"Methinks I see grim Slavery's Gorgon form": Abolitionism in Belfast, 1775-1865

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I confirm that the word count of this thesis is less than 100,000 words.

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Illustration 1. Erin tearing off her chains

"Tun'd to Freedom" (*Paddy's Resource*, 1795)

Abstract

This thesis examines abolitionism in Belfast from its origins in the late eighteenth century through to the late nineteenth century. In this period Ireland underwent fundamental change. Belfast was not immune. It was transformed from a small Presbyterian town on the periphery into Ireland's preeminent industrial city. This study will demonstrate that Belfast abolitionism issued from many sources. The local context is important, most strikingly in the theme of the 'Irish slave'. This noted, one must also appreciate how Belfast abolitionism was conditioned by contemporary local, national, transnational, and international events and campaigns. This thesis is the first to undertake a longitudinal study of Belfast abolitionism in its various and multiple contexts. It throws fresh light on local, national, and international history.

Despite the prominence and endurance of Belfast abolitionism it is an understudied aspect of Irish and British abolitionism, an imbalance this study addresses. Building upon earlier research, this thesis details how the formation of the Irish as slave mentalité and the impact of local demands for political and religious reform underpinned the appeal of abolitionism in Belfast. It examines how local change, for example the development of 'Britishness', impacted upon abolitionism. It also notes that there was strong continuity, most notably the survival of the Irish slave mentalité and ideas of liberty and natural rights, that ensured support for the abolitionist cause in Belfast. This made Belfast a prominent centre of abolitionism on the national and ultimately transatlantic stage.

Introduction

From the mid-1770s, notions of liberty and natural rights lay at the heart of Belfast abolitionism. The continuity of this into the next century can be seen from an article of April 1833 in the *Belfast News-Letter* that declared: "Every man who is born has an absolute right, beyond all possible laws and customs, to personal liberty, nor can he ever rightfully be deprived of it…"[1]

Throughout the landmark events in the history of abolition – the abolishment of the British slave trade in 1807, the emancipation of British slaves in the 1830s[2], and the end of American slavery in 1865[3] – the abuse and inhumane treatment of African slaves was roundly condemned in Belfast. Criticism of slavery was tightly entwined with local perceptions of the mistreatment of the Irish – Catholic and Dissenter – in the eighteenth century during the penal era. The impact of the penal laws on Irish memory was profound. A belief took root that the persecuted Irish wore a "Badge of Slavery".[4] Slavery thus became an object of attack in the form of the 'Irish slave' and slavery in general. The 'Irish slave' proved to be an enduring theme in Belfast abolitionism. As this thesis will demonstrate it survived into the nineteenth century, despite considerable political, social, demographic, and economic change.[5]

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[1] *Belfast News-Letter*, April 12, 1833.
[2] While the British Abolition of Slavery Act took place in 1833, the government put in place the apprenticeship system. The system attracted significant criticism and was abolished in 1838, allowing for full emancipation.
[3] While American slaves were emancipated in 1863 under the Emancipation Proclamation, the Thirteenth Amendment was not ratified until December 1865.
[4] The impact of the Test Act on Ulster's Presbyterians is still the subject of on-going dispute among Irish historians. For more information see in chronological order: Ian McBride, 'Presbyterians in the Penal Era', *Bullán*, 1, (1994): 73-86; J. C. Beckett, *Protestant Dissent in Ireland 1687-1780*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2009). In relation to the Irish wearing a 'Badge of Slavery' see: John Abernathy, *Scarce and valuable tracts and sermons*, (London: R. Griffiths, 1751).
[5] For the various studies detailing change in Belfast see, in chronological order: Peter Gibbon, *The Origins of Ulster Unionism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975); Frank Wright, *Two Lands on One Soil: Ulster Politics before Home Rule*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1995); Christine Kinealy and Gerard MacAtasney, *The Hidden Famine: Hunger, Poverty and Sectarianism in Belfast 1840-50*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000); Catherine Hirst, *Religion, Politics and Violence in nineteenth-century Belfast*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002); A. C. Hepburn, 'Prisoners of the City': Catholic Belfast in the Late Nineteenth Century', in A. C. Hepburn., *Catholic Belfast and Nationalist Ireland in the era of Joe Devlin: 1871-1934*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7-37; John Bew, *The*

Slavery and anti-slavery were fraught topics in eighteenth-century Ireland, with Irish involvement in the slave trade and slave produce in the British colonies.[6] The debates in Ireland were part of a broader debate across the British Isles in this period. The Somerset case of 1772 had a notable impact on British abolitionism, attracting more press attention and developing more cohesion in abolitionist organisation.[7] This saw the beginning of petitions and bills in the attempt to end the British Slave Trade. Here, Enlightenment notions of liberty played a significant role in abolitionist thought.

The Scottish Enlightenment had most influence in Ireland (and Belfast) due to Irish Presbyterians being educated in Scottish Universities.[8] Enlightenment ideology – most notably liberty – had particular appeal in Ireland against a background of perceived ill treatment of the Irish, the Catholic majority and the Dissenters, by the British government and the Ascendancy. Anti-slavery agitation became popular in the Belfast press and in events such as the attempts of the Belfast Amicable Society in 1781 to harbour a runaway slave who escaped his master's boat in Belfast harbour.[9] Anti-slavery thought and action were prevalent in Belfast in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Despite the prominence and durability of Belfast abolitionism it is an understudied aspect of Irish and British abolitionism, and as a movement in the town's history. A primary

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Glory of Being Britons: Civic Unionism in Nineteenth-Century Belfast, (Dublin; Irish Academic Press, 2009).

[6] Nini Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: 1612-1865*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 55-81.

[7] For more information regarding the Somerset case see, in chronological order: William R. Cotter, 'The Somerset Case and the Abolition of Slavery in England', *History*, 79, No. 255, (February 1994): 31-56; Stephen M. Wise, *Though the Heavens May Fall: The Landmark Trial That Led to the End of Human Slavery*, (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2006); Dana Rabin, ''In a Country of Liberty?': Slavery, Villeinage and the Making of Whiteness in the Somerset Case (1772)', *History Workshop Journal*, 72, Issue 1, (October 2011): 5–29.

[8] The Scottish Enlightenment had an impact in Ireland where the demands for freedom of religious persecution and natural rights were often complex and intertwined. The Scottish Enlightenment's belief in natural rights and liberty became inexorably linked with the Presbyterian Church which welcomed enlightened ideology. In this period Presbyterians were not allowed to enter Trinity College, Dublin which was only open to members of the Established Church of Ireland. They therefore sought education in Scotland, where the Presbyterian Church was the Established Church.

[9] Henry Joy, *Historical collections relative to the town of Belfast: from the earliest period to the union with Great Britain*, (Belfast: G. Berwick, 1817), 163-4.

aim of this thesis is to redress this imbalance. It seeks to outline Belfast abolitionism's origins and development and how it interacted with local, national, and international contexts. We note, for example, how Belfast abolitionism initially drew support from egalitarian views, while later it also attracted conservative support. Here the influence of inherited memories of the penal era will be apparent. Belfast abolitionism crossed political and ideological divides as it drew from libertarian, egalitarian and conservative trends.

Historiography

This thesis does not start from a blank page. It acknowledges and builds upon the work of previous historians. In the following discussion of the historiography of abolitionism, a thematic approach has been adopted that contrasts with the chronological approach of the thesis. A thematic discussion of the historiography is felt to be the most appropriate means to highlight key issues of abolitionism, and to identify the gaps that exist in their relationship to the history of Belfast abolitionism. This thesis is timely, for there are excellent studies of abolitionism, and a growing knowledge of local Belfast history. Yet the two areas have not been combined. In recent years industrialisation in Belfast has attracted comparative analysis,[10] yet the same does not hold true for Belfast abolitionism. There has been considerable progress in studies of Belfast history. Important works by John Bew, Jonathan Wright, Stephen Small, Nini Rodgers, Christine Kinealy and Gerald Hall have greatly enhanced knowledge of religion and politics within Belfast and its connections to the wider world.[11] With a burgeoning historiography on Belfast, the literature focusing on British abolitionism also continues to grow and important works by Claire Midgley, Nicholas

[10] John Lynch, *Belfast Built Ships,* (Gloucestershire: History Press, 2012); Kyle Hughes, *The Scots in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast: A Study in Elite Migration*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

[11] For these various studies see, in chronological order: Nini Rodgers, *Equiano and Anti-Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Belfast* (Belfast: Belfast Society Publications, 2000); Stephen Small, *Political thought in Ireland 1776-1798: Republicanism, Patriotism, and Radicalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); John Bew, *The Glory of Being Britons*; Christine Kinealy, *Daniel O'Connell and the Anti-Slavery Movement*, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011); Gerald R., Hall, *Ulster Liberalism: 1778-1876*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011); Jonathan Jeffrey Wright, *The 'Natural Leaders' and their World: Politics, Culture and Society in Belfast, c.1801-1832*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012).

Hudson, Christopher Leslie Brown and J. R. Oldfield and others will inform this study throughout.[12] Additionally, Rodgers and Daniel Ritchie have addressed some of the notable gaps within Belfast abolitionism.[13] Despite this progress there still remains much to be uncovered, as the following will demonstrate.

Abolitionism in Belfast

In *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: 1612-1865*, Nini Rodgers provides an excellent analysis of both slavery and anti-slavery in Ireland. The first section details the activities of the Irish in the Caribbean, Britain, France and Africa and Irish involvement in slavery and the trade of slave produce. The second section discusses how Irish owned plantations in the Caribbean and North America benefitted and influenced Ireland economically, socially and politically. The final part looks at Emancipation and the role Irish MPs played in the abolition of the British slave trade. Here Frederick Douglass' visit to Ireland in the mid-1840s, and the associated agitation of the Irish anti-slavery societies, is considered highly important. Rodgers examines the role in slavery of several prominent Dissenters, especially Waddell Cunningham and Thomas Greg who were heavily involved in the trade of slave produce.[19] Rodger's analysis is a comprehensive overview of slavery and anti-slavery in all of Ireland. As a consequence, the richness of a locality such as Belfast is not covered in any great detail, Rodgers cannot understandably delve into the inner workings and development of Belfast anti-slavery support. Rodger's research does, nevertheless, raise several questions regarding Belfast abolitionism. First, Belfast benefitted from slave produce so what inspired local abolitionism? Here Rodgers discusses whether there existed a "special relationship"

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[12] Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns 1780-1870*, (London: Routledge, 1995); Nicholas Hudson, 'Britons Never Will Be Slaves': National Myth, Conservatism, and the Beginnings of British Antislavery, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 34, No. 4 (2001): 559-576; Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*, (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006); J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2008).
[13] Rodgers, *Equiano*; Daniel Ritchie, "Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism: The public career of the Revd Isaac Nelson", (Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 2014).
[19] Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery*, 145-58.

between slaves and the Irish due to analogies between "black bondage and Irish conditions."[20] She goes into excellent detail as to why the conditions experienced by the slaves was vastly different to that seen in Ireland under the penal laws. Indeed, contemporaries in Belfast were aware that they were not mistreated to the same extent as the African slaves.[21] However, the emotion and association of slavery was felt. This produced an empathy for slaves that fed into abolitionism. Some recent studies have argued that the penal laws and the treatment of Irish Catholics and Dissenters was similar to, and in some cases worse than, the African slaves.[22] Joe Cleary has even gone so far as to compare the Protestant Ascendancy to the planters in the Southern States of America.[23] David Brundage's study of Irish Nationalists in America observes that Wolfe Tone regularly used the slave trope in relation to the impact of the penal laws in Ireland.[24]

A second question raised in response to Rodgers study revolves around Belfast's development from a small town in the eighteenth century to a city in the latter nineteenth century. How did economic and social change impact on abolitionism? Did the increase in the town's Catholic population and the immigration from the countryside affect local abolitionism? These are important questions for this thesis.

Daniel Ritchie has made an important contribution to the study of abolitionism in Belfast. His study examines abolitionism through the prism of the biography of the Presbyterian Revd Isaac Nelson. Ritchie details Nelson's interest in anti-slavery and his reaction to the 1859 revival. Ritchie covers some of Rodgers' ground,[25] for example events of the 1840s such as the 'Send back the Money' campaign in which the Scottish Free Kirk accepted donations from the pro-slavery churches within the US. The Free Kirk's actions, as

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[20] Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery,* 312.
[21] *Belfast News-Letter,* February 1, 1788.
[22] Anita Kulina, *Millhunks and Renegades: A Portrait of a Pittsburgh Neighborhood,* (Pittsburgh: Brandt Street Press, 2003), 50.
[23] Joe Cleary, ""Misplaced Ideas"? Colonialism, location, and dislocation in Irish Studies", in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory,* ed. by Claire Carroll and Patricia King, (Cork: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 16-45.
[24] David Brundage, *Irish Nationalists in America: The Politics of Exile, 1798-1998,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 15.
[25] Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery,* 284.

a sister church, placed the Presbyterian Church of Ireland (PCI) into a difficult position. Ritchie explains the consequences the Free Kirk's action had on Presbyterian abolitionism and the town's anti-slavery society (BASS). While very good on this particular case study in the context of Nelson's life, Ritchie does not undertake a longitudinal study of Belfast abolitionism. Confined to Nelson and Presbyterianism, Ritchie does not delve into anti-slavery support among other denominations. Were Presbyterians the backbone of Belfast abolitionism throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? Were there any denominational disputes around abolitionism and was this picture complicated by population growth over time?

The strengths and weaknesses of the biographical approach to the study of Belfast abolitionism are also evident in Rodgers's earlier study *Equiano and Anti-Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Belfast*. This focused on the visit of the former slave Olaudah Equiano to Belfast during which he lodged with and formed friendships with members of the United Irishmen.[26] In discussing this visit Rodgers highlights how opposition to the penal laws overlapped with abolitionism. Rodgers also notes the prominent Belfast residents who participated in and benefited from the slave trade. With this study addressing anti-slavery through the prism of a person, its focal point was not upon anti-slavery and its development and continuation.

The topic of Belfast slavery and anti-slavery is complex. As discussed by Rodgers, Belfast contained both numerous abolitionists and profiteers of the slave trade. Oldfield's study *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery* similarly shows that British anti-slavery was complex in its anti-slavery organisation and support, particularly in how this support contributed to the rise of popular politics in Britain. Oldfield's research was significant as he located abolition within the context of broader socio-economic trends and demonstrates how at this time in British history popular politics was beginning to arise. Richard Huzzey continued this approach, examining Victorian anti-slavery support and the rise of a British

[26] Rodgers, *Equiano*.

anti-slavery ideology. He observed that in "describing anti-slavery as an ideology [it] recognizes the variety of opinions, methods, and definitions that could be accommodated around a core set of beliefs."[27] Yet, despite such significant studies on British abolitionism there are no studies which focus upon the development of Belfast's anti-slavery sentiment and the themes behind it. This is despite Belfast's unique position in the nineteenth century of a unionist town in a nationalist Ireland. Belfast's omission is surprising in the light of notable studies on slavery and anti-slavery support in Ireland by Christine Kinealy and Rodgers.[28]

Kinealy's study of O'Connell touches upon his abolitionist sympathies and illustrates the similarities in anti-slavery agitation common to Ireland, Britain, and the United States. Yet, Kinealy's assertion that Belfast anti-slavery activity was mostly linked with the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches is not wholly correct.[29] It is true that Presbyterianism was a bastion of abolitionism for three basic reasons: (1) anti-slavery support in the eighteenth century was entwined with enlightenment thinking. The Scottish Enlightenment and the fact Irish Presbyterian ministers were educated in Scotland, meant that enlightenment ideology, such as egalitarianism and natural rights, made its way into Ireland (2) abolitionism in Belfast was connected in the early 1790s with the Presbyterian members of the United Irishmen; and (3) the significant support for the Belfast Anti-Slavery Society from the Presbyterian ministry. However, as will be discussed in later chapters, Belfast abolitionism included other faiths, including Catholicism and Quakerism.

Religion, Politics and Language

Recent local histories of Belfast have addressed religious and political turbulence in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and sought to place local developments in a broader context, including comparative analysis. This is a welcome departure from previous works,

[27] Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain*, (London: Cornell, 2012), 8.
[28] Kinealy, *Daniel O'Connell and the anti-slavery movement.*
[29] Ibid., 135.

such as on Presbyterian conservatism, that were narrowly focused.[30] Jonathan Wright's *The 'Natural Leaders'* is a good example of understanding Belfast in a wider British narrative.[31] Wright argues Belfast radical and liberal nineteenth century efforts at civic improvement owed more to radicalism and liberalism in Britain than 'Protestant versus Catholic' or 'Repeal versus Union' divisions in Belfast. Similarly, in *The Glory of Being Britons,* John Bew argues that Unionism was a "genuinely held British national identity" that looked to Britain and Europe for its ideas.[32] Bew also contends that changes in Ulster's political identity and culture came about from the nineteenth-century, rather than as claimed in Protestant ideology from the Battle of the Boyne.[33]

Bew contends that the abolition of slavery in 1833 was a seminal moment in cultivating a British national identity among educated middle-class Protestants.[34] This thesis analyses a broader range of religious outlooks. Belfast abolitionism encompassed Presbyterian, Catholic, and Quaker denominations. Here we agree with Nicholas Hudson's observation that it is important not to overlook religious minorities.[37] This is particularly important in the Belfast context as, for instance, the town's Quakers launched what turned out to be an influential publication for abolitionist thinking, the *Irish Friend,* which demonstrated the importance of public opinion on topics from abolition, female education to social obligation.[38]

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[30] For these assorted studies see, in chronological order: J. Brewer, and G. Higgins, *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland: The Mote and the Beam*, (London: Macmillan, 1998); Hirst, *Religion, Politics and Violence*; David Hampton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society 1740-1890*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 24; Allan Blackstock, and Frank O'Gorman. eds., *Loyalism and the Formation of the British World, 1775-1914*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2014).
[31] Wright, *The 'Natural Leaders'.*
[32] Ibid., xiv.
[33] Ibid., xiv.
[34] Ibid., 136.
[37] Hudson, 'Britons Never Will Be Slaves', 561.
[38] The *Irish Friend* was the first Quaker aimed newspaper in the British Isles. It was published between 1837-1842. A very popular newspaper, it ceased publication when its founder and editor moved to the United States. William Bell, the founder and editor, did insist that the paper be fully independent and unconnected to the Society of Friends in Ireland. This was due to Bell wanting the freedom to publish on topics which the national Society believed could cause strife, such as criticism of British and American Quakers, as the national Society did not wish for discord. However, it is important to note the local Society disagreed as Bell found support among local Meetings, both in Belfast and Lisburn. See: Minute Book, Lisburn Monthly Meeting, 1813-1840, (Men's and Women's), Strong Room, Lisburn Quaker Meeting House, Lisburn, Northern Ireland.

In regard to public opinion Seymour Drescher has focused on a revolution of public opinion in political discourse in the eighteenth-century.[39] We see this also in eighteenth-century Ulster, particularly in regard to the Penal Laws. Sean Connolly's *Religion, Law, and Power: The Making of Protestant Ireland 1660-1760* notes that while the penal laws did not outlaw Catholic and Dissenter worship, they did impose a range of restrictions.[40] This made the penal laws controversial. As Ian McBride states: "No other European kingdom or province, then, was subjected to such extensive and sustained colonisation; and nowhere else did the consequent antagonisms exert such an enduring and controlling pull over subsequent history".[41] Resentment at the penal laws in Ireland fed into support for the abolition of slavery. This was certainly the case in Belfast.

There has been some historical dispute about the ideological underpinnings of abolitionism. Roger Anstey has argued that abolition was a social revolution initiated by liberalism and radicalism. The assumption drawn from this is that abolitionists were radical reformers.[42] Nicholas Hudson added an important qualification that there was "no inconsistency between social conservatism or religious conformity and opposition to slavery in the eighteenth-century."[43] For Hudson, Britons prized "liberty above their lives".[44] He points out that some of the most well-known British abolitionists, such as Samuel Johnson, William Wilberforce and Grenville Sharp, were not radical thinkers out to offend the establishment, but were instead caught in an ideological conflict about the very nature of "Britain" itself.[45] Hudson demonstrates that many of these 'radicals' were in fact staunch Anglicans who held conservative views on numerous social and political issues in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century. In Belfast it is also the case that abolitionism was

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[39] Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 68.
[40] S. J. Connolly, *Religion, Law, and Power: The Making of Protestant Ireland 1660-1760*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 263-64.
[41] Ian McBride, *Eighteenth Century Ireland (New Gill History of Ireland 4): The Isle of Slaves*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2009), 165.
[42] Roger Antsey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810*, (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1975), 91-153.
[43] Hudson, 'Britons Never Will Be Slaves', 560.
[44] Ibid., 568.
[45] Ibid., 560.

not tied to one political or religious outlook but attracted support from a range of beliefs and ideas. The growth of Belfast conservatism in the early to mid-nineteenth-century discussed by several scholars thus did not undermine local abolitionism in this period.[46]

It is important to note the changing political landscape in Belfast in the nineteenth century but also crucially that individuals of different political and religious complexions could unite around abolitionism. Abolitionism is thus a point of unity in what is often presented as a city of contested and conflicting beliefs. Despite disagreements over how to obtain emancipation of the slaves and even conflict over the description of other Irish experiences, anti-slavery was a cause that saw those of differing religious and political views often align. This alignment is not wholly surprising. In recent years, studies have shown that the changes from Presbyterian liberalism to conservatism were significantly more complex than a simple shift.[47] This study will demonstrate that, similarly, Belfast anti-slavery support was affected by issues relating to treatment under the penal laws as well as political and ideological viewpoints throughout the period. Wright's work on Belfast's liberals and moderates (through the scope of the Tennent family) of the early to mid-nineteenth-century demonstrates their interest in abolition. The Tennent's, particularly William and his nephew Robert, were known as staunch abolitionists. Robert Tennent showed particular zeal in the topic and was a member of the delegation who went to London in 1833 to demonstrate and draw support for the 1833 Act.[48] In regard to the developments from the liberalism of the eighteenth century to the growing conservatism of the nineteenth century, Gerald Hall's study on *Ulster Liberalism* is significant. The individuals that Hall focuses on within the

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[46] For these various studies see, in chronological order: Hampton and Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism*; A. R. Holmes, 'Covenanter politics: evangelicalism, political liberalism and Ulster Presbyterians, 1798-1914' in *English Historical Review*, cxxv, No. 513 (Apr. 2010): 340-69; Daniel Ritchie, "Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism: The public career of the Revd Isaac Nelson", (Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 2014).

[47] For these various studies see, in chronological order: A. T. Q. Stewart, "The transformation of Presbyterian radicalism in the North of Ireland, 1792-1825", (MA thesis, Queen's University, Belfast, 1956); David W. Miller, "Presbyterianism and "Modernization" in Ulster", *Past and Present*, 80, No. 1 (1978): 66-90: Andrew Holmes, *The shaping of Ulster Presbyterian Belief and Practice: 1770-1840*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Bew, *Glory of Being Britons*; Holmes, 'Covenanter politics'; Gerald R. Hall, *Ulster Liberalism, 1778-1876: the middle path*, (Dublin, 2011).

[48] To the Friends of the Anti-Slavery Cause in Ireland, 1833. James Tennent Papers, D1748/G/282/1, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.

study are not clearly divided into nationalist and unionist camps, instead Hall focuses upon Ulster liberals who were looking to reform specific socio-political policies. Hall argues that while Ulster was becoming increasingly polarised around religious lines**,** many who were part of the liberal reform of the first half of the nineteenth century have been largely disregarded. Attempts to broach this divide have been made by scholars such as Wright who has similarly argued that the cultural and intellectual life of Presbyterians in late Georgian Belfast has been systematically overlooked.[49] As one of (if not *the*) major liberal causes of the period and involving considerable input from Presbyterians, it follows that abolition has been overlooked too. A central concern in many previous studies of Ulster Presbyterianism has been to explain its shift towards conservatism during the nineteenth-century.[50]

During the eighteenth-century Belfast's Presbyterians were not the conservatives that they would become in the latter nineteenth century. Local Presbyterians and their anti-slavery sentiment was heavily influenced by broader intellectual and political developments and trends. This awareness is critical to this thesis, for example in the link between the Scottish Enlightenment and its notions of liberty and natural rights, and Belfast Presbyterianism and abolitionism. Here we also need to note the imprint of a history of perceptions of oppression. Stephen Small's *Political thought in Ireland 1776-1798: Republicanism, Patriotism, and Radicalism* links changes in Irish politics to dissatisfaction with the connection to Britain. While Ian McBride discussed the impact of the penal laws in fomenting discontent,[57] Small notes the negative impact of Irish Trade restrictions by which Ireland could not trade directly with the American colonies or Africa. By the time the restrictions were lifted in 1781, Small argues that Irish patriotism had formed a rhetoric of commercial grievance that fed into numerous Patriot movements.[58]

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[49] Wright, *The 'Natural Leaders',* 239.
[50] See, in chronological order: J. Brewer, and G. Higgins, *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland: The Mote and the Beam*, (London: Macmillan, 1998); Hampton and Hill , *Evangelical* Protestantism, 24; Hirst, *Religion, Politics and Violence*; Blackstock and O'Gorman, *Loyalism*.
[57] McBride, *The Isle of Slaves*, 311.
[58] Small, *Political Thought*, 265.

Lost voices: The female perspective

The role of women in anti-slavery campaigns has been severely neglected. This is true of the historiography of Ulster abolitionism and that of the United Kingdom more generally. In 1992, Claire Midgley completed the first extensive study of female activity in British anti-slavery. This revealed that women played a valuable role in the anti-slavery movement beyond the male-dominated sphere of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS).[69] Women were very prominent in local anti-slavery circles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly in industrialised areas such as Manchester and Sheffield.[72] Midgley demonstrates that women's associations were disillusioned with male dominated societies that focused on parliamentary agitation. In this period female abolitionists faced many challenges, at times bordering on persecution. In 1840 the BFASS, for example, banned female US representatives from speaking or taking their seats in the first World Anti-Slavery Convention in London.[78] As Marilyn Walker has observed, despite organising meetings, sugar abstention campaigns and petitions, women's contribution was not fully recognized.[79] Yet despite such issues, many women still regularly donated to the cause.[80] The restrictions they faced strengthened their resolve to continue campaigning for abolition and to pursue other feminist causes. Some female abolitionists developed distinctive "feminine perspectives on matters of anti-slavery policy and ideology".[82] According to Midgley post 1825 several female anti-slavery societies became fully independent, printing their own propaganda and building networks with other female anti-slavery societies across Great Britain and the United States.[89]

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[69] Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, 23, 16, 15.
[72] Ibid., 18.
[78] Lydia Murdoch, *Daily Life of Victorian Women*, (California: Greenwood Press, 2014), 239.
[79] Marilyn Walker, 'Writing Resistance: The Politics and Poetics of British Women's Antislavery Verse, 1785—1865', (Ph.D. thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2008), 6.
[80] Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, 24.
[82] Ibid., 6.
[89] Ibid., 198-199.

Independent female abolitionist activity was largely responsible for organising three national petitions against slavery in 1833, 1838 and 1853.[90] In this general picture of increased historical awareness of the role of women abolitionists, little has been written on Belfast women and welfare reform and abolition, although some studies of women's involvement in radicalism more generally provide useful suggestions for further research.[91]

In Belfast, female involvement in abolition in the nineteenth century was eased by the fact that the Religious Society of Friends and New-Light Presbyterians (Unitarians) permitted women a level of equality, stressing "freedom of thought, independence and individual autonomy".[93] The study of Belfast women and abolition undertaken here will largely confirm Midgley's analysis. Female Quakers enjoyed a better level of education and could comment on public issues, this has also been demonstrated through the articles published in the *Irish Friend* which detailed stories relating to the importance of female education. One such story related to a Methodist minister who was adamantly against women preaching. He stated during a sermon "I suffer not a woman to teach". The *Friend* reported however that the minister had his beliefs altered by his own daughter who quoted from the Bible: "Paul went into Philip's house and he had four daughters that did preach". When her father attempted to correct her that the word in their version was "prophecy" his daughter said she looked at the Greek and found it translated to be "preached". The minister, seeing his error, declared that "he was mortified that his own little girl should pull down his sermon; but I perceived my error, and hope I shall never speak against women's preaching any more."[94]

A number of British women were activist abolitionists. The fact that liberal reformism in general was cross denominational also provided opportunities for women of other faiths to become involved in abolitionism as well as other social issues such as poverty

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[90] Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, 199.
[91] Mary McNeil, *Life and Times of Mary Ann McCracken*, (Dublin: Allen Figgis and Co., 1960).
[93] Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, 19.
[94] *Irish Friend*, Vol. 1, No. 7, p. 3. For further articles that encouraged female education and activity see *Irish Friend*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 4.

and education. This was seen in the Belfast Ladies' Anti-Slavery Association, which had a number of members from different denominations with many also members of the Belfast Ladies' Association.

This thesis will demonstrate that some Belfast women were active abolitionists, contributing to local and national campaigns.

Quakers and the Irish Friend

Belfast Quaker interest in abolition emerged in the nineteenth century. Neville Woodhouse's study of Belfast Quakers revealed that their earlier insularity contrasted with British Friends.[98] This changed in the nineteenth century, most notably with the publication in Belfast of the *Irish Friend* newspaper from 1837 onwards. Bernard Canter's unpublished study highlights the evolution of Belfast Quakers in this period, with the newspaper being the first Quaker newspaper in the British Isles.[99] Canter offers excellent detail on its distribution in Ireland and Britain, but given his focus on a general overview, many topics raised are not discussed in detail. Most notably from the point of view of this thesis, its abolitionist propaganda is mentioned only in passing. Our discussion will fill this lacuna.[100]

The Linen Industry, Economy and Trade

In the 1860s Belfast earned the nickname 'Linenopolis'. There have been several economic histories of Belfast in the era of industrialisation.[115] The linen industry was a leading

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[98] Neville H. Newhouse, 'John Hancock Jnr, 1762-1823', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 101, No.1 (1971): 41-52, (p. 47).
[99] Bernard Canter, 'A Pioneer Quaker Newspaper: The Irish Friend, 1837-1842', (Unpublished manuscript: Private Collection, Newry, 1967). The newspaper was inspired by the American Quaker newspaper *The Friend* – the first ever Quaker periodical and founded in Philadelphia in 1827.
[100] For these various studies see, in chronological order: Richard T. Vann, *The social development of English Quakerism, 1655-1755*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969); James Walvin, *The Quakers: Money and Morals*, (London: John Murray, 1997); Julie L. Holcomb, *Moral Commerce: Quakers and the Transatlantic Boycott of the Slave Labor Economy*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Stephen W. Angel and Pink Dandelion, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Quakerism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[115] For these various studies see, in chronological order: W. H. Crawford, *Domestic industry in Ireland: the experience of the linen industry*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972); W. H. Crawford, *The Irish Linen Industry*, (Belfast: Published by the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum in Conjunction with the Irish Linen Guild, 1987); Philip Ollerenshaw, *Banking in nineteenth-century*

employer. Its growth attracted migration from Ulster's hinterlands.[116] The 1860s was also the period of civil war in America, which had a particular impact on the Belfast economy. This thesis will address a lacuna in focusing on Belfast abolitionism in the American Civil War era. It will offer a corrective to the major study of this topic undertaken by Francis Carroll. Drawing upon the papers of Dr John Young, the US Consul to Belfast during the years of the war, Carroll argues that Young believed "the mercantile class and even the clergy" in Belfast had been influenced by pro-slavery Southern activists.[117] He also uses newspaper sources to provide further evidence for Young's opinion. As Young stated, a "strong partiality for the South" was apparent in the conservative *Belfast News-Letter*.[118] This was largely a result of the newspaper drawing from the London *Times* for much of its information and analysis. However, the picture is rather more complicated than Carroll's argument suggests. As will become apparent later, Belfast was greatly affected by its own local history during the Civil War and was a prominent supporter of liberty. As a result, the *Belfast News-Letter* could adopt an abolitionist stance, as seen during the Harpers Ferry raid, or be critical of the Union as during the scandal surrounding the Royal Mail ship the *Trent* (although this criticism of the Union did not imply approval of slavery). In general, pace Carroll, this thesis will demonstrate the strength of Belfast abolitionism throughout the period of the US Civil War.

Methodology and Scope

Choice of Belfast and Chronology

Ireland: the Belfast banks, 1825-1914, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987); Philip Ollerenshaw and Brenda Collins, *The European linen industry in historical perspective*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[116] Liam Kennedy, 'The Rural Economy 1820-1914', in *An Economic History Of Ulster, 1820-1939*, ed. by Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 1-61; Crawford, *The Impact of the Domestic Linen Industry*.

[117] Francis M. Carroll, 'Belfast and the American Civil War', *Irish Studies Review*, 19, No. 3, (Aug. 2011): 245-260, (p. 247).

[118] Ibid., 247.

Belfast was by and large a Presbyterian town in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ulster was the only province in Ireland that had a significantly large Protestant population, particularly Dissenters. The involvement of local Presbyterians in the Scottish Enlightenment greatly contributed to Belfast's liberalism and its anti-slavery movement. The town itself was an oddity, a Presbyterian industrial power in a Catholic agrarian country. Its history is compelling due to its complexity, as numerous studies attest.[132] By Belfast, this study focuses on the town and a ten-mile radius.[133] This enables an in-depth study of Belfast abolitionism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It also enables us to capture Belfast abolitionism in a period of great economic and social change from being a small Presbyterian town in the eighteenth century to the country's pre-eminent industrial city in the late nineteenth century.[134] The periodization of this study is unique as no previous study has looked purely at Belfast and the development of its anti-slavery sentiment in this period.

The timeline of the thesis captures this period of change. The study begins in 1775 when the American Revolution was capturing the Irish imagination. A fillip was given to liberalism and egalitarianism in Belfast.[135] This is discussed in Chapter One.

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[132] For these various studies, see in chronological order: Alison Jordan, *Who Cared? Charity in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast*, (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, 1992); W. H. Crawford, 'The Belfast middles classes in the late 18th Century' in *The United Irishmen: republicanism, radicalism, and rebellion* ed. by David Dickson, Dáire Keogh, Kevin Whelan, (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993); Jonathan Stephenson, *We Wrecked the Place: Contemplating an End to the Northern Irish Troubles*, (New York: Free Press, 1997); Paul Bew and Gordon Gillespie, N*orthern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles*, 1968-99, (Dublin: Gill and McMillan, 1999); David McKittrick and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles: A History of the Northern Ireland Conflict*, (London: Penguin, 2001); Hirst, *Religion, Politics and Violence*; A. C Hepburn, 'Prisoners of the City': Catholic Belfast in the Late Nineteenth Century', in *Catholic Belfast and Nationalist Ireland in the era of Joe Devlin: 1871-1934* ed. by A. C. Hepburn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; Bew, *Glory of Being Britons*; Wright, *The 'Natural Leaders'*; Kenneth Lesley-Dixon, *Northern Ireland: The Troubles: From The Provos to The Det, 1968-1998*, (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2018); Simon Prince, *Northern Ireland's '68: Civil Rights, Global Revolt and the Origins of the Troubles*, New edn., (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2018).

[133] Ten miles has been chosen as the maximum distance as many of Belfast's middle-class citizens while working in the town lived on its outskirts. Especially those involved in the linen trade which had its hub in nearby Lisburn with wares then sold in Belfast's Linen Hall. In addition, the predominant Quaker Meeting House before the establishment of Belfast's first Meeting House in Frederick Street was Lisburn's Meeting House.

[134] Geoffrey Lewis, *Carson: The Man Who Divided Ireland*, (London: Hambledon and London, 2005), 15.

[135] The American Patriots were members of the Thirteen Colonies who rejected the role of the British Empire. They instead sought independence from Britain. This would lead to the American Revolutionary War from 1775-83. For more information see: T. H. Breen, *American Insurgents,*

Primary Sources and Methodology

This thesis will draw upon a broad range of primary sources. The rich collection of extant contemporary newspapers are invaluable to this study. These newspapers will include, but are not limited to, the *Belfast News-Letter*, the *Northern Whig*, the *Belfast Mercury*, the *Belfast Mercury; or, Freeman's Chronicle*, the *Banner of Ulster*, the *Belfast Morning News*, the *Northern Herald*, the *Vindicator*, the *Ulsterman*, the *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, *Belfast Monthly Magazine* and the *Northern Star*. The most prominent newspapers being the *Banner of Ulster*, *News-Letter*, *Northern Star*, *Morning News*, *Northern Whig* and *Vindicator*. Further details, such as circulation figures can be found in Appendix 2 of this thesis.

The town's newspapers are the main evidence for this thesis's analysis of the content of Belfast abolitionism. It is important to appreciate that early newspapers were written for a small readership who were the literate members of the community. However, as literacy grew newspapers became a significant focal point in daily life. British parliamentary records were often covered in significant detail in Belfast's press as the majority of nineteenth century newspaper editors assumed that parliamentary debates were of prime importance. In addition, the Church of Ireland Synod got excessive coverage, and almost every paper gave details regarding meetings of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. In addition, prior to the partition of Ulster in 1921 all Ulster papers gave excellent coverage of events in the South of Ireland, including reports of the cases in Dublin's High Court and country assizes.[136] Aiken McClelland has noted that in this period "newspapers [were] a mirror of the age."[137] Due to the press being the sole providers of news, by the early nineteenth century newspapers had become of paramount importance:

American Patriots: The Revolution of the People, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010); Rick Santorum, *American Patriots: Answering the Call to Freedom*, (Illinois: Tyndale House, 2012).

[136] Aiken McClelland, 'The Ulster Press in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Ulster Folklife*, 20, (1974): 89-99, (p. 90).

[137] Ibid., 92.

> Newspapers had become part of everyday life…[and] were highly prized by a population hungry for news…Their contents were devoured and dissected, and the information and views they imparted provided the basis for public debate.[138]

When reading Ulster newspapers in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is important to note that very few Ulster newspapers were independent of religion or politics. Indeed, Belfast's newspapers were generally aligned with the Presbyterian or Catholic Churches, though there were divergences regarding their political outlook. Some newspapers such as the *News-Letter* also saw their political outlook radically alter due to a change in editor and/or pressure placed on the Irish press by the Irish government, as seen during the 1790s. It is therefore necessary to use a varied range of the town's newspapers across the political and religious spectrum to gauge how and in what ways Belfast's anti-slavery agitation developed and was sustained. In doing this, it is important to understand which papers were the most prominent. McClelland has claimed that it is near impossible to find the circulation figures for eighteenth and nineteenth century newspapers.[139] While this is true for the newspapers that survived only a short period – particularly in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – circulation figures for a significant number of Belfast's newspapers are available.[140]

Other sources that are of importance to this thesis include the partial surviving records of the Belfast Anti-Slavery Society and of the Belfast Ladies' Anti-Slavery Association. These sources are incomplete, largely due to the loss of national archives in the twentieth century or due to poor paper quality. This is frustrating but much valuable information can still be gleaned.[141] Other records used here include the personal papers of

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[138] Hannah Barker, *Newspapers and English Society 1695-1855*, (London: Routledge, 2014), 1.
[139] McClelland, 'The Ulster Press', 90.
[140] For newspaper bios and circulation figures see: Appendix 2.
[141] During the course of this research the scholar used the archives of the Clifton Street Poor House in Belfast. A considerable number of the women later involved in the Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society were long-time members of the female committee within the Poor House. Their meetings were held within

members of local societies', church records, diaries and contemporary narratives. The range of historical approaches appropriate to analyse these sources is as broad as the topic and will include insights from cultural, local, political, social, women's and religious history.

Quantitative analysis in this study is minimal, employed where appropriate, as in chapter three, to produce data of the number of local newspaper articles which mention the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act.[142]

Structure and Chapter layout

This thesis is structured chronologically. This is the best method to trace the origins and development of Belfast abolitionism in a longitudinal study characterised by great change. We can note the continuities within the discontinuities. Each chapter marks a new stage in the progress of Belfast abolitionism and can be read as self-contained accounts of the ups and downs in particular periods as well as part of an overall narrative.

Chapter One traces the origins of Belfast anti-slavery thought in the late eighteenth century during a period of increased radicalism and political instability and is subdivided into four distinct sections. The first notes the inception and development of the contemporary comparison of African and 'Irish slaves'. The second section discusses the reception of enlightenment themes of liberty and natural rights by Belfast's Dissenters. The third section examines Belfast abolitionism in the local press and the reception of national campaigns locally. The fourth section details the growth of Belfast abolitionism in the radicalism of the 1790s.

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the Poor House and their records have stayed within the buildings. However, only in the last number of years have the modern committee begun to archive the documents. It has since come to notice that during their storage in the intervening years that many of the lesser quality papers were damaged beyond repair. Many of these were the notes belonging to the Ladies' committee.

[142] For more information on the Fugitive Slave Act see, in chronological order: Stanley W. Campbell, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); R. J. M. Blackett, *The Captive's Quest for Freedom,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Chapter Two looks at the Belfast anti-slavery movement following the 1801 Act of Union. The chapter is organised into four sections. The first section looks at the immediate impact of the Act of Union upon the development of Belfast abolitionism. The second section notes the increase of anti-slavery outlooks among the town's religious denominations at a time of significant population growth. Here particular attention is given in turn to the Religious Society of Friends and Catholicism. The third section focuses upon the continuity of the 'Irish slaves' theme. The fourth section details connections and/or links between the national and local anti-slavery campaigns, particularly around the establishment in 1830 of the official Belfast Anti-Slavery Society.

Chapter Three looks at Belfast abolitionism following the ascension of Queen Victoria in 1837. In this period there was the particular complication of 'identity' affecting the abolitionist agenda. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first will analyse anti-slavery views of the late 1830s and early 40 in the local press and propagated by the Belfast Anti-Slavery Society (BASS). The second section will examine the impact of religious issues in the 1840s and the deadly influence of the great famine. It will end with the passage of the American Fugitive Slave Act (FSA) in 1850 and the local reaction, noting a number of significant visits to Belfast of former slaves and abolitionists including Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison. The third section notes the involvement of local Quakers and the publication in Belfast of the *Irish Friend*. Here the connection between Temperance and anti-slavery will feature, with former slaves lecturing on Temperance and anti-slavery. The fourth section will look at the enduring appeal of the 'Irish slave' theme in this period, including here the influence of the Great Famine.

Chapter Four examines Belfast abolitionism in the context of the American Civil War, seen as a conflict to end one of the last bastions of the slave system. It will, as noted above, take issue with Carroll's subject John Young asserting that Belfast in this period displayed a "painfully strong "partiality for the South"".[143] This chapter is divided into four

[143] Carroll, 'Belfast and the American Civil War', 247.

sections. The first section will focus on the publication of anti-slavery articles in the Belfast press and the reaction of local publications to the election of Lincoln and reports of the secession of the Southern States. The second section will look at the effects of the Civil War upon Belfast's economy, particularly its linen and cotton industry. A third section will address the charges of hypocrisy levelled at the Union government and the impact of the New York Draft Riots and the *Trent* affair on Belfast perceptions of the war. The fourth section will detail the effects of inherited memories on the views surrounding liberty and natural rights and how these themes continued to be cornerstones of Belfast's anti-slavery outlooks.

In conclusion, this thesis will present the most detailed account to date of anti-slavery thinking and activity in Belfast from the eighteenth century to the emancipation of slaves in the US in 1865. The chronological approach is best suited to bring out the rich tapestry of Belfast abolitionism as it survived and grew in a period of political, religious, economic and social change.

Chapter One

"That horrible degradation of human nature": Abolitionism in late eighteenth-century Belfast

Over the course of the last seventy years the study of Britain's involvement in slavery and anti-slavery has continued to command historical attention.[1] Seymour Drescher has argued that recent research has focused upon "the ecology of British antislavery, its general social and imperial context" which "have generated the most fruitful and most intense controversy."[2] In an innovative study on British anti-slavery in Victorian Britain, for example, Richard Huzzey argues that anti-slavery is "an ideology that recognises the variety of opinions, methods, and definitions that could be accommodated around a core set of beliefs."[3] Yet, despite such interest in the campaigns and abolitionist ideology of Britain's abolitionist history, this topic in Ireland is relatively under-researched. There are two main monographs, and some supplementary work around the United Irishmen, liberals and the Presbyterian clergy of Belfast.[4] While work on Belfast is welcome, there is no comprehensive analysis of anti-slavery thought in Belfast in this period.[5] Key questions of this chapter are: how did the eighteenth-century discussions surrounding the penal laws and Irish slaves affect or influence anti-slavery thinking? Did the national anti-slavery campaign/campaigners influence anti-slavery support in Belfast? What organisations and/or publications pursued an anti-slavery agenda? Who were the individuals involved? What was the importance of the Scottish Enlightenment and how did events in Ireland impact upon the

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[1] See, in chronological order: Oldfield, *Popular Politics*; Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Age of Abolition*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1977); Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*; James Walvin, *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Origins and Effects in Europe, Africa and the Americas*, (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1981); Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*.

[2] Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, 2.

[3] Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, 8.

[4] Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery*; Kinealy, *Daniel O'Connell and the anti-slavery movement.*

[5] Nancy Curtin, *The United Irishmen; Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Ritchie, 'Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism'.

anti-slavery scene in Belfast?[6] Broader political, religious and social turbulence in Ireland in the eighteenth century has been well-researched.[7] Religious sectarianism, the power of the landed elite, the disenfranchisement of Catholics and Dissenters and agrarian upset, were all significant issues which resulted in a deeply divided society in eighteenth-century Ireland. This chapter will demonstrate that a combination of national and local contexts greatly influenced anti-slavery thinking in Belfast.[8]

African slaves and 'Irish slaves': An enmeshed ideology

Eighteenth century support for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade took place during a tumultuous period in British history. There was significant anger amongst ordinary Irish towards the political elite because of the adverse effects of the penal laws in Ireland. This resentment in turn undoubtedly affected how some Irish viewed slavery and the slave trade. Most notably, some Irish drew similarities between their situations and that of the slaves and we can observe this occurring most in the urban centres such as Belfast. Predominantly a Presbyterian town since its foundation in the seventeenth century, Belfast was significantly affected by the penal laws and contained a considerable number of reformers in the late eighteenth century. For some, the comparison between themselves and the African slaves was due to a perceived emotional connection, as they believed slaves were mistreated and

[6] Belfast like most towns in the period contained both abolitionists and anti-slavery advocates. There are multiple arguments surrounding the use of abolitionist or anti-slavery supporter, largely depending on the time period in question. Prior to 1807, an abolitionist is termed as someone who campaigns against the transatlantic slave trade, whereas after 1807 it is used for those who wanted existing slaves freed. Anti-slavery is a more diluted term, in that it indicates an attitude, or way of thinking, for those who were against continuing slavery. For this thesis, anti-slavery and abolition will be used interchangeably.

[7] See, in chronological order: R. B. McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution, 1760-1801*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); T. W. Moody and W. E. Vaughan, ed., *A New History of Ireland, Vol. IV: Eighteenth-Century Ireland, 1691-1800*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986); David Dickson, *New Foundations: Ireland 1660-1800*, rev. edn (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000); S. J. Connolly, *Divided Kingdom*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Thomas Bartlett, *Ireland: A History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 143-266; James Kelly, 'Patriot Politics, 1750-91', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish History* ed. by Alvin Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 479-96; Ultán Gillen, 'Ascendancy Ireland, 1660-1800' in *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland*, ed. by Richard Bourke and Ian McBride, (Princeton and Oxford, 2015), 48-73.

[8] For more information on anti-slavery, popular politics and reform movements see: Oldfield, *Popular Politics and Anti-Slavery*.

abused just as the Irish had been. This perceived connection would see growing support for abolition within certain sections of the town. In 1779, for example, the Presbyterian Reverend Samuel Barber authored a sermon discussing "That horrible degradation of human nature, the slave trade…" [9] Barber's critique of slavery was not an uncommon topic for the clergyman, nor were his views unique. A few years later he would claim that a good Christian would not support slavery:

> [a good Christian]…shall act not only as reasonable creatures…but disengaged likewise from the imperious dictates of depraved nature (the worst of slavery) he shall enjoy a perfect un-interrupted peace of mind and secure a blessed mansion… [10]

Barber's criticism of slavery was not simply a reflection of the growing popularity of broader anti-slavery opinions in the late eighteenth century.[11] In previous years the Irish had often been described as slaves, and this became a persistent theme in writings on eighteenth-century Ireland, with the argument that while they were not slaves by law, they were slaves in every other sense.[12] For this reason, the discussions of chattel slavery were highly entwined with Belfast inhabitants' perceptions of their own experiences.

The notion of the Irish as slaves had origins at least into the early eighteenth-century and this no doubt aided its power in the context of later views on slavery. In the 1720s, for example, the Anglo-Irish satirist and poet Jonathan Swift claimed that English legislative interference had reduced the Irish to slaves.[13] Others went further than simply claiming the

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[9] Samuel Barber Papers, 602, Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[10] Samuel Barber Papers, PA36, Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[11] Late Eighteenth-Century Britain saw great changes in a number of citizens views regarding the slave trade. For information on Britain's eighteenth century anti-slavery campaigns see, in chronological order: Sir Reginald Coupland, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement*, (London: Routledge, 1964); Brown, *Moral Capital*; Stephen Ahern, ed., *Affect and Abolition in the Anglo-Atlantic*, 1770-1830, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); Srividhya Swaminathan, and Adam R. Beach ed., *Invoking Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century British Imagination*, (London: Routledge, 2016).
[12] McBride, *The Isle of Slaves*, 125.
[13] Jonathan Swift, *The Hibernian patriot: being a collection of the Drapier's letters to the people of Ireland (…)*, (Dublin: A. Moor, 1730), 113-143.

Irish existed under political slavery, with Lord Chesterfield, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland from 1745-6, observing that the Irish poor "are used worse than negroes by their lords and masters, and their deputies of deputies of deputies."[14] Lord Clonmell, the future Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench in Ireland, also compared the treatment of the Irish as being similar to another eighteenth century abuse, by casting the English administration in the role of Dutch planters, claiming that the "common Irish divided, oppressed, pillaged and abused as they are, are the Hottentots".[15]

Alongside the effects of the penal code, the introduction of the Sacramental Test in 1704 acted to increase feelings of the Irish as slaves. In Belfast, where Presbyterians held numerous offices, acceptance of the sacrament was not possible. The Sacramental Test determined that to be accepted into office, any Presbyterians would need to receive Holy Communion according to the rites of the Established Church. For many who were faithful to their Church, this simply couldn't be done. As a consequence, the town's sovereign, David Butle, resigned.[16] The Test Act brought about great local discord since the predominantly Presbyterian local population was not represented in local government. Intense anger at the limitations imposed on those not members of the Established Church was common, and local anger in Belfast at this situation was shared across Ireland.[17] For many the penal code heavily restricted their religious and political lives, with only the minority members of the

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[14] Earl of Chesterfield, *The Letters of Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield*, ed. Bonamy Debree, 6 vols, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1932), vi. 2617.

[15] John Scott, *Ireland before the Union: with extracts from the unpublished diary of John Scott, LL.D, Earl of Clonmell (…),* ed. by William J. Fitzpatrick, (Dublin: W. B. Kelly, 1867), 32-33. For more on the treatment of the Khoikhoi please see Emile Boonzaier, *The Cape Herders: A History of the Khoikhoi of Southern Africa*, Ohio Athens: University Press, 1996.

[16] Photograph of David Butle's original letter in which he resigned the Office of Sovereign owing to "a late Act of Parliament disabling disentors to service in public office", July 29, 1704, T533/1, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (P.R.O.N.I.), Belfast, Northern Ireland.

[17] For an excellent survey on Ireland in the Eighteenth century see McBride, *Isle of Slaves.* For more detailed analyses see R. B. McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism*; S. J. Connolly, 'Jacobites, Whiteboys and Republicans: Varieties of Disaffection in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 18 (2003): 63-79; Vincent Morley, 'The Continuity of Disaffection in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 22 (2007): 189-205; T. W. Moody and W. E. Vaughan eds. *A New History of Ireland, Vol. IV: Eighteenth-Century Ireland, 1691-1800*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); David Dickson, *New Foundations: Ireland 1660-1800*, rev. edn (Dublin: Irish academic Press, 2000).

Anglican Church benefitting.[18] Whilst the impact of the Test Act on Ulster's Presbyterian's is still a matter of on-going dispute, the expansion of Test Act restrictions from Catholics to the broader Dissent community led to more Irish believing they wore a 'Badge of Slavery'.[19]

The regular occurrence of famine and its related migration was another factor underpinning the popularity of the view that the Irish were slaves or slave like.[20] Belfast anti-slavery advocates such as Barber employed slave terminology in relation to Ireland when he argued that "…Evidence that we are an enslaved People as every Nation must be where the law is not the will of that community. Look forward to better days..."[21] Like Barber, Belfast's press also used slave analogies. In August 1783 the *Belfast Mercury or, Freeman's Chronicle*, for example, published the following:

> A test encroaches upon the liberties of a member no more than the coronation-oath does on the liberty of a king. Both have the liberty of doing what they *ought* to do. Both are bound to serve their country; but that service is PERFECT FREEDOM…Reflect on the glorious triumph of your neighbours in the County of Antrim, over their *lordly tyrants*, and if ye will not tamely submit to be *bought* and *sold* as the cattle of your fields.[22]

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[18] For more information on the penal laws see: Maureen Wall, *The Penal Laws, 1691-1760*, (Dublin: Dublin Historical Association, 1961); Louis Cullen, 'Catholics under the Penal Laws', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 1 (1986): 23-36; John Bergin, Eoin Magennis, Lesa Ní Mhunghaile, and Patrick Walsh, eds., 'New Perspectives on the Penal Laws', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, special issue, 1 (2011).

[19] This is a continuing debate among Irish historians. For more information see: Ian McBride, 'Presbyterians in the Penal Era', *Bullán*, 1, (1994): 73-86; J. C. Beckett, *Protestant Dissent in Ireland 1687-1780*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2009). In relation to the Irish wearing a 'Badge of Slavery' see John Abernathy, *Scarce and valuable tracts and sermons*, (London: R. Griffiths, 1751).

[20] E. R. R. Green, 'The "strange humours" that drove the Scotch-Irish to America, 1729', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 12, No. 1 (January 1955): 113-23, (p. 113); McBride, *Isle of Slaves*, 125. Lords Chesterfield and Clonmell also used slave terminology when commenting on the mistreatment of the Irish in the period. See Letter to the Bishop of Waterford, 1764, *The Letters of Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield*, ed. Bonamy Dobree, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1932), vol 6, 2617; W. J. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Ireland before the Union: With extracts from the Unpublished Diary of John Scott, LL.D., Earl of Clonmell, …,* (Dublin: W. B. Kelly, 1867), 32-33; James D. G. Dunn, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 73.

[21] Revd Samuel Barber Collection, PA36, Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, Belfast, Northern Ireland. There are many comments discussing the enslavement the majority of the country in the period. There are numerous contemporary sources that mention the Irish and slavery in relation to the penal code. Please see papers such as those belonging to Edmund Burke, National Library of Ireland, 2A 3463 and NLI Special List No. 430; William Steel Dickson, *Sermons of William Steel Dickson*, (Belfast: Joseph Smyth, 1817).

[22] *Belfast Mercury; or, Freeman's Chronicle*, August 22, 1783.

Further examples of the Irish as slaves or in a slave like condition abound in this period. In 1786, the Belfast-born physician and anti-slavery supporter William Drennan, published *Letters of Orellana, an Irish Helot* that included the theme of slavery and Ireland, with a Helot in ancient Sparta being a state slave.[23] First published in the *Belfast News-Letter*, then more widely distributed, Drennan addressed readers as fellow slaves. Drennan's anger at the Irish political and social situation was reflected in his correspondence and was widely shared.[24] In 1785 the *Belfast News-Letter* opined:

> …To preserve the independence of Parliament and our constitutional and commercial rights, we shall deem no sacrifice too dear. Doubt not the support of the nation: Irishmen know their rights, and will maintain them. We are loyal to our Sovereign. We wish to preserve inviolate to latest ages the most friendly connection with our fellow subjects of Great Britain; but we will never tamely submit to be SLAVES.[25]

Despite the wide usage of slave metaphors, it is important to note that the treatment of the Irish under the penal laws was in no way similar to that experienced by those enslaved within the chattel system. While Catholics and Dissenters were stripped of such rights as to own property, be married in Church and partake in politics, slaves were stripped of all rights, including control over their own bodies or being able to stay with family members. This fundamental difference was understood by contemporaries. In February 1788, for instance,

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[23] William Drennan, *Letters of Orellana, an Irish Helot, to the Seven Northern Counties (…)*, (Dublin: J. Chambers and T. Heery, 1785).
[24] William Drennan to William Bruce, 1784-85, D/553/20,43,45, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland; William Drennan to Sam McTier, February 16, 1794, D/591/470, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland. In 1784 Drennan also published the *Letters of an Irish helot* anonymously in an effort to revitalise the declining Volunteer movement. A year later they were re-published as *Letters of Orellana, an Irish helot, to the seven northern counties*.
[25] *Belfast News-Letter*, August 16, 1785. For more information on Belfast's newspapers see: Appendix 2.

the *Belfast News-Letter* demonstrated its understanding of the differences between the African slaves and that of the Irish thus:

> The cruelties practiced on those wretches…Shooting, whipping; hanging alive, by the heels or shoulders, confining them tied and suspended in cages, exposed to a burning sun— such, such are the punishments inflicted on them when guilty of a crime, or perhaps to please the will of their tyrant, purse-proud masters. Happy, thrice happy Ireland, that knows not such seenes [sic] of cruelty, blood-thirstiness, and oppression![26]

There was recognition that conditions in Ireland were less severe than that of the African slaves, but references to the Irish as slaves nevertheless continued. A belief in hierarchies of slavery abounded in which the Irish featured at some point.[27] The idea of slavery by degree was not new. In 1760 the *Dublin Courier*, for example, made reference to the "several degrees of slavery to which the nation may be gradually subjected…"[28]

Concepts of slavery and degrees of slavery were clearly embedded in the contemporary discourse. This was related to and rooted in beliefs in liberty and freedom that are evident in discussions of chattel slavery and the Irish experience. Here we also note the influence of the ideology of the Scottish Enlightenment that would have a fundamental impact on abolitionist support and the calls for reform in Ireland.

The Enlightenment Era: The Scottish Enlightenment, equality and libertarian ideology

Discussion of liberty in Ireland was further stimulated by the enlightenment and its focus on

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[26] *Belfast News-Letter*, February 1, 1788.
[27] Reference to the degrees of slavery has been made in a number of studies by both contemporary and modern-day academic scholars. For more information see Richard Slaughter, interviewed December 27 1936, in Federal Writers Project, *Virginia Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in Virginia from Interviews With Former Slaves*, (Bedford: Applewood Books, 2006), 46; Frederick Marryat , *A Diary in* America*: With Remarks on Its Institutions*, Vol. 2, (Baudry: Crapelet, 1839), 248; Arthur L. Stinchcombe, S*ugar Island Slavery in the Age of Enlightenment: The Political Economy of the Caribbean World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 130.
[28] *Dublin Courier*, January 14, 1760.

the natural rights of men.[29] The Scottish Enlightenment, in particular, had a special impact in Ireland where the demands for freedom of religious persecution and natural rights were often complex and intertwined. Amongst Belfast anti-slavery thought, the impact of the Scottish Enlightenment writings of Francis Hutcheson and Thomas Reid is evident, helped by the fact that the majority of Ireland's Presbyterian clergy was educated in Scotland.[30] The Scottish Enlightenment and its belief in natural rights and law became inexorably linked with the Presbyterian Church which welcomed enlightened ideology.[31]

In a situation in which support for abolition in the 1780s was fragmented and often operated at the individual level, the combination of Presbyterianism and the Scottish Enlightenment was important. New-Light Presbyterianism or Unitarians as they came too be known, for example, played a significant role in Belfast's burgeoning anti-slavery thinking by utilising and spreading enlightenment ideology.

New-Light Presbyterianism, the more radical and intellectual wing of the Presbyterian Church, was extremely popular in Belfast in the period, particularly among the more educated and wealthier members of Ulster Presbyterians.[32] Liberty was deeply embedded in both the Old and New-Lighter belief systems. As noted by John Bew, New-Light Presbyterianism believed that "To constrain freedom of enquiry was to restrict the religious liberty which was essential to human fulfilment." [33] This encompassed science and rationality. Samuel Barber rejoiced "…at the amazing advances of knowledge and the progress of science which must ever by favourable to truth and fatal to error. Science

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[29] The use of the term 'The Enlightenment' is under debate with historians such as John Pocock and Roy Porter describing it as being making it sound like a caucus or conspiracy. As a result, other terms such as 'enlightenment' or 'enlightenments' have been suggested. In the quest for simplicity, this thesis will use the term 'The Enlightenment', however it must be recognised that the enlightenment was not one movement but a collection of many. For more information please see: Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World*, (London: Penguin Books, 2000).
[30] Being Presbyterian, they were barred from entering Trinity College in Dublin as it was only open to members of the established church.
[31] Murray N. Rothbard, *Economic Thought Before Adam Smith: An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought*, (Auburn: Ludwig Von Mises Institute, 1995), I, 423-25.
[32] John Bew, *Castlereagh: Enlightenment, War and Tyranny*, (London: Quercus, 2011), 9.
[33] Ibid., 9.

enforces the mind…" [34] This interest in advancement, scientific and moral, was a notable attribute of the town's abolitionist supporters.

In 1786, for example, the *News-Letter* described how scientific studies using the bodies of Africans demonstrated that black skin resulted wholly from climate. [35] The newspaper discussed how climate affected changes in skin and how "Negroes transplanted into Europe, will, in a few generations, become white; and Europeans, residing in Guinea, will change to a brown complexion". While, it would later be discovered that evolution was not this simple, the *News-Letter* was employing scientific reasoning to promote abolition:

> we are all sprung from the same stock; and…the following are the grand colours discernible in mankind:
>
> White, - (goes in between), Olive Copper,
> Brown, Black.[36]

Thus, Africans were black simply due to climate and this did not render them inferior to white Europeans whose skin colour was also subject to change. The article finishes with the investigator, Mr Clarkson, arguing that "Noah and his family, from being natives of Persia, were of a copper colour; and that his white descendants have run as much from the original complexion as the blacks."

Throughout the 1780s scientific reasoning underpinned abolitionist arguments in the press. In 1785, for example, a further article addressed the intelligence of Africans.[37] This revolved around an African child, bought from slavery, that had been raised in Britain and provided with an excellent education. The child later attended University and passed the bar enabling him to practice law. This story demonstrated that with the right support, African

[34] Samuel Barber Papers, PA36, Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[35] *Belfast News-Letter*, September 19-22, 1786.
[36] Ibid., September 19-22, 1786.
[37] Ibid., November 4, 1785.

slaves could achieve as much as European children and that their intelligence was not innately subpar. That same month, the *News-Letter* published a more direct attack on the contemporary negative perceptions of Africans:

> That the Africans are an inferior link in the grand chain of nature is a prejudice, which has been indulged in and propagated by Europeans, especially in modern times, from considerations peculiarly sordid and contemptible; the fact is that the mental faculties of the negroes are by no means of a subordinate description to those of any other men. Persons conversant with their manners, their intrigues, and their social intercourse with each other in various parts of the British plantations, entertain a very different idea of their sagacity and invention. [38]

In some instances, we can note an interesting inversion of the superior (European) and inferior (African) paradigm. Some criticism of slavery contrasted the 'innocence' of Africa/Americas/Pacific Islands natives and the 'corruption' of the modern world. In this model, it was the Europeans who were the barbarians who were corrupting innocent natives.[39] This was also connected to the notion that slavery was a corruption of the natural rights emphasized by the enlightenment. We see these connections strongly in the work of the Irish Presbyterian philosopher Francis Hutcheson, who championed the rights of slaves in his work *A System of Moral Philosophy*:

> As to the notions of slavery which obtained among the Grecians and Romans, and other nations of old, they are horridly unjust. No damage done or crime committed can change a rational creature into a piece of goods void of all right.[40]

[38] *Belfast News-Letter*, September 5-8, 1786.
[39] Porter, *Enlightenment*, 358.
[40] Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy*, Vol 2, (New York: P. M. Kelley, 1968), 202-3.

Furthermore, Hutcheson declared that "all people have the right to life [and] natural liberty… these natural rights equally belong to all…."[41] Further demonstrating a belief in the shared connection between the Irish experience, anti-slavery and support of natural rights, Hutcheson included the penal code as undermining liberty, "These laws prohibit the greatest and wisest of mankind to inflict any misery on the meanest, or deprive them of any of their natural rights."[42] In Hutcheson's theory of morality emotion was the true guide for moral behaviour. This is also seen in anti-slavery support seen in Belfast in which emotion played a role at least equal to enlightenment reasoning.[43]

Hutcheson's impact in Belfast, along with that of the enlightenment, is evident in that popular local figures, such as William Tennent, had a copy of Hutcheson's treatise in his library, alongside books by Scottish and French Enlightenment thinkers such as Beattie, Blair, Turnbull and Voltaire.[44] Tennent's library was also accessible to his friends. Further adding to the town's enlightened outlook was the formation of the Belfast Reading Society in 1788, and the later Belfast Society for Promoting Knowledge in 1792, of which Thomas Russell, a vocal abolitionist, was appointed librarian.

Familial connections were also important in the development of enlightenment thinking in Belfast. William Drennan's father Thomas, for example, had once served as Hutcheson's assistant with Thomas sharing many of Hutcheson's enlightened views. William would later credit his ardent patriotism and liberalism to the influence of Hutcheson and his father.[45] Furthermore, Drennan was later to attribute the failure of an attempt to get him to abandon radical political beliefs to the continuing memory of his father: "…I said that I had

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[41] Francis Hutcheson, *Francis Hutcheson: Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed., John McHugh (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2014), 265.
[42] Francis Hutcheson, A *System of Moral Philosophy, in three books*, (London: R. and A. Foulis, 1955), 293-96, 299.
[43] *Belfast News-Letter*, November 4, 1785; September 19-22, 1786; September 16, 1788.
[44] Tennent Papers, April 24, 1818, D1748/A/3/4/8, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[45] Ian McBride, 'The School of Virtue: Francis Hutcheson, Irish Presbyterians and the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Political Thought in Ireland Since the Seventeenth Century*, ed. D. George Boyce, Robert Eccleshall and Vincent Geohegan, (London: Routledge, 1993), 92.

early formed my principles in politics and that my father to his last hour had desired me never to forsake them…"[46]

The strength of enlightenment thinking in Belfast is reflected in the level of reportage of the horrors of the slave trade in the local press throughout the late 1780s. At times, ironic humour mocked supporters of slavery, for example in the following story regarding the academic success of a slave in the United States:

> I shall give you one anecdote of the extent and force of this faculty of his mind: 'Some gentlemen…sent for him…to know the certainty of the stories they had heard of him…One of them asked him how many seconds a man of seventy years; and some odd months; weeks, and days, had lived? In a minute and a half he told the number. The gentleman took up his pen and after calculating the same sum…told him he was wrong. "Top, massa," said the slave, "you forget de leap years."[47]

The author declares that the slave can neither read nor write, yet can complete complex mathematics in his head, and goes on to make clear that this story should serve to excite a more just opinion of our "African Brethren" in order to abolish the slave trade. The article lightly mocked the man who disagreed with the slave's correct answer, and offered an emotional connection between the slave and reader, helped by the fact that the author personalised the previously anonymous slave by naming him as Thomas Fuller.

Emotive articles regarding slavery, abolition and liberty were a frequent literary device among Belfast abolitionists as noted in articles published in the *News-Letter*. The strength of Belfast abolitionism is reflected not only in the written word, but also in events such as Belfast merchant Waddell Cunningham's failed (1786) proposal to establish a Belfast

[46] Drennan Papers, December 1, 1792, D/591/353, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[47] *Belfast News-Letter,* September 16, 1788.

slave-ship company.[48] Yet, like its contemporaries, the *News-Letter* was written for a small readership, and a Protestant one at that. Examining the newspaper's impact regarding contemporary issues like slavery is, therefore, problematic if not impossible. However, as Brian Inglis has noted, newspapers in this period reflected rather than influenced trends.[49] As a result, it could be argued that the topics seen within the *News-Letter*, such as enlightenment thinking, anti-slavery and the concept of liberty were popular among its readership and in the local population more generally. Here a connection between natural rights, Irish history and chattel slavery was undoubtedly important. Criticism of the British and Irish government policy in Ireland, was accompanied in the late eighteenth century by growing support among certain sections of Belfast for the national campaign to end slavery.

Local support and the influence of the national anti-slavery campaign

In the 1770s and 80s abolitionist support began to gain momentum in Britain. The popularity of abolition campaigns grew and the debates surrounding slavery were increasingly reported in the press.[50] These debates became significantly more prominent following the Somerset case of 1772, held in London. It was brought before Lord Mansfield after James Somerset, a slave, made application for *habeas corpus* to prevent being taken abroad and sold as his master Charles Stewart intended. With public interest high, donations were made to both camps for legal costs. Prior to the Somerset case, slavery was not authorised by statute in

[48] In 1786 Waddell Cunningham, a popular Presbyterian merchant in Belfast who sat on a number of local committees, called a meeting to propose the establishment of a slave-trading company within Belfast, which was subsequently denied. Cunningham had numerous connections to and profited from the slave trade. For more information see, in chronological order: Drennan Letters, D591/3, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland; Bill Rolston, 'Waddell Cunningham and Belfast's role in the slave trade, "A Lying Old Scoundrel"' *History Ireland*, 11.1 (Spring 2003): 24-27; Thomas M. Truxes, 'London's Irish Merchant Community and North Atlantic Commerce in the Mid-Eighteenth Century' in *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks in Europe and Overseas in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Jan Parmentier, Jane Ohlmeyer, and David Dickson (Gent: Academia Press, 2007), 285. Waddell Cunningham, Valentine Jones and Robert Montgomery, all international importers and traders, were extremely important regarding the success of the town's new White Linen Hall. See W. H. Crawford, 'The Belfast middles classes in the late 18th Century' in *The United Irishmen: republicanism, radicalism, and rebellion*, ed. David Dickson, Dáire Keogh, Kevin Whelan (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993), 64-65.

[49] Brian Inglis, *Freedom of the Press in Ireland 1784-1841*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), 17.

[50] *Derby Mercury*, February 1, 1750; *Newcastle Courant*, March 1, 1750; *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, February 29, 1760; *Derby Mercury*, June 17, 1760; *Dublin Courier*, November 26, 1760.

England and Wales.[51] Mansfield's decision that slavery was unrecognised in common law even if it did not apply to the British Colonies, was considered the first major volley fired by British abolitionists.[52] Between 1691 and 1779 British ships transported 2,141,000 slaves from Africa and colonial ships took a further 124,000.[53] That a British court could decide that slavery could not exist within the British Isles, when the country was heavily involved with the trade, gave hope to British abolitionists such as Granville Sharp and led to a spike in public support nationally.[54] Like other British newspapers, the *Belfast News-Letter* published regular updates regarding the Somerset case, at one-point labelling it "a very interesting trial…", and subsequently approved of Mansfield's finding.[55]

The 1780s would be a popular decade for abolitionist support both nationally and in Belfast. Abolitionists gained more attention in the national press. With the MP William Wilberforce joining the cause, the subject became regularly debated in parliament from 1788 onwards. The Belfast press regularly reported and commented on national trends and this in turn impacted on the local abolitionist scene.[56] In 1785, for example, the *News-Letter* carried an article by the English doctor James Ramsay, "The Life of a Slave".[57] Ramsay was an ex-

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[51] For more information regarding the Somerset case see Stephen M. Wise, *Though the Heavens May Fall: The Landmark Trial That Led to the End of Human Slavery*, (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2006); William R. Cotter, 'The Somerset Case and the Abolition of Slavery in England', *History*, 79, No. 255, (February 1994): 31-56; Dana Rabin, ''In a Country of Liberty?': Slavery, Villeinage and the Making of Whiteness in the Somerset Case (1772)', *History Workshop Journal*, 72, Issue 1, (October 2011): 5–29.

[52] George Boulukos, *The Grateful Slave: The Emergence of Race in Eighteenth-Century British and American Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 100; Peter P. Hinks, John R. McKivigan, eds., *Encyclopedia of Antislavery and Abolition*, Volume 2, (London: Greenwood Press, 2007), 643.

[53] David Richardson, 'The British Empire and the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1660-1807', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol, II: *Eighteenth century*, ed. by P. J. Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 442.

[54] Granville Sharp was one of the first English abolitionist campaigners. He was a campaigner against a wide array of social injustices. For more information see, in chronological order: Stephen Tomkins, *The Clapham Sect: How Wilberforce's Circle Transformed Britain*, (Oxford: Lion Books, 2012); Granville Sharp, *A Representation of the Injustice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Andrew Lyall, *Granville Sharp's Cases on Slavery*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

[55] *Belfast News-Letter*, May 26, 1772; June 9, 1772; June 2, 1772.

[56] Ibid., January 18, 1788; May 13, 1788; January 23, 1789; May 19, 1789.

[57] Ibid., March 29, 1785.

doctor for the Royal British Navy, witnessing first-hand the treatment of slaves on slave ships. This experience led him to become a staunch abolitionist:

> [They suffer]…beating with a stick, sometimes to the breaking of bones, the chain, an iron crook about the neck, a large iron ring about the ankle…There have been instances of splitting ears, breaking of limbs, for as to make amputation necessary, beating out of eyes, and castration…[58]

Emotive imagery such as Ramsay's was common in British abolitionism. Belfast followed suit in promoting the humanity of slaves. In January 1788, for instance, the *News-Letter* published an article reporting the prohibition of the slave trade in Rhode Island. The editor was elated and subsequently reported the creation of the famous seal of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, with the newspaper calling it an "ingenious device".[59] In 1792 Belfast's two most popular newspapers the *Northern Star* and the *News-Letter* published details of William Wilberforce's motion to bring in a Bill to prevent further importations of slaves to the West Indies.[60] The *News-Letter* was often complimentary of Wilberforce and regularly reported his abolitionist activity. In 1792, for example, it published a story he divulged during a recent session in the House of Commons. The story, like many others surrounding abolition, was highly emotive and told of a 15-year-old slave girl who was being transported on a slave ship. The girl was naked and "appeared to be exceedingly modest" so hung her head in embarrassment. The captain, instead of taking pity on her, ordered for her to be suspended by her wrists in front of all the crew. He then had her removed only to be once again chained and suspended by her legs. Following this, she was suspended for a third time by only one leg. Very soon she had a fit and within three days she was dead.[61] The Belfast press was thus positive regarding Wilberforce and his motion to

[58] *Belfast News-Letter*, March 29, 1785.
[59] Ibid., January 25, 1788.
[60] *Northern Star*, January 7-11, 1792; *Belfast News-Letter*, April 6, 1792.
[61] *Belfast News-Letter*, April 6, 1792.

bring in a Bill to prevent the "further importations of slaves to our islands in the West Indies".[62]

Support in Belfast for Wilberforce's national campaign found support among local abolitionist networks. In 1781, for instance, the Amicable Society of Belfast was outraged at a notice in the *News-Letter* offering a reward for the return of a runaway slave described as "Indian Black". The Society's members were irate that a human being was being described as "property" and that his master was threatening legal action against any who would help him. As a result, the Society pledged its help to the escaped slave:

> …to our unfortunate fellow-creature, the foresaid Indian black…we will not only harbour him, but enable him, by pecuniary donations, to carry on a legal prosecution against his intended enslaver, who…has committed the most daring outrage on the liberty of the subject, and has wantonly attempted the perpetration of a deed repugnant to human nature, or to civil society.[63]

Clearly some Belfast abolitionists viewed slavery as an evil trade. While local anti-slavery sentiment was undoubtedly on the rise, it is true that Belfast enjoyed economic benefits from slavery. The town's growing prosperity, which permitted expanding intellectual liberalism and enlightenment thinking which in turn fostered abolitionist sentiments, was funded by companies that were heavily involved in slavery and the trading of slave produce.[64] These companies would help place Belfast on the manufacturing map, and included the small but technologically significant sugar refining sector.[65] Furthermore, when its expansion halted,

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[62] *Northern Star,* January 7-11, 1792.
[63] Henry Joy, *Historical collections relative to the town of Belfast: from the earliest period to the union with Great Britain*, (Belfast: G. Berwick, 1817), 163-4.
[64] Waddell Cunningham, Valentine Jones and Robert Montgomery, all international importers and traders, were extremely important regarding the success of the town's new White Linen Hall. See W. H. Crawford, 'The Belfast middles classes in the late 18th Century' in *The United Irishmen: republicanism, radicalism, and rebellion*, ed. David Dickson, Dáire Keogh, Kevin Whelan (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993), 64-65.
[65] Rodgers, *Equiano*, 18.

cotton became a significant industry in Belfast. While linen remained Ireland's dominant industry throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it did suffer periods of severe depression. This resulted in mass unemployment and the migration of Irish citizens to find work around the globe, further contributing to the tensions in Ireland. However, the introduction of the cotton industry in Belfast and its hinterlands, somewhat saved the situation in the north by alleviating some of the pressure of the linen depression.[66]

The growth of Belfast and the role of the slave trade in its rising prosperity did not hinder or hamper the continuing march of Belfast abolitionism. It both supported and in some senses, went further than the national campaign. This is evident, for example, in the local view of Wilberforce that was both supportive and critical. Especially in the *News-Letter* where Wilberforce's stance and actions in Parliament were regularly praised, with the newspaper describing him as a "man endowed with great humanity and considerable ability".[67] Yet despite such respect, from a local perspective the paper also criticised him and another esteemed gentleman, Edmund Burke, for their apparent blindness in relation to Ireland and the issue of slavery much closer to home:

> There is a peculiar structure of vision, which, though it enables a man to see objects, at a certain distance dearly, yet leaves those which are nearer, indistinct and confused. The same law appears to regulate the "mind's eye". For instance, Mr. Wilberforce in England a man endowed with great humanity and considerable ability, looks across the Atlantic, and sees the manifold distress of our African brethren in the Weft Indian Islands...Mr. Edmund Burke, with equal humanity, and a more powerful understanding, fees [sic] farther than Mr. Wilberforce...[Yet] What a pity that the organs of these great and good men, and of the many respectable characters who

[66] John J. Monaghan, 'The Rise and Fall of the Belfast Cotton Industry', *Irish Historical Studies*, 3, No. 9, (1942): 1-17 (p. 2)
[67] *Belfast News-Letter,* April 3, 1792.

> support them, are not calculated to inspect the state of the miserable Irish Slaves, who groan under oppression within sixty Miles of a land of Liberty.[68]

The balancing act of praise and criticism continued several days later when the *News-Letter* published an abolitionist story that Wilberforce had brought to the attention of Parliament, and once again the newspaper spoke of Wilberforce positively.[69]

The national campaign for abolition was popular among all social classes, with support particularly seen within sections of the middle classes and the aristocracy.[70] However, Belfast's support generally came from within the local educated middle classes, a consequence of the town's political and religious make up, although the Belfast aristocracy could on occasion back abolitionism. As early as 1775, for example, Lord Rawdon, Earl of Moira, wrote to his mother from Vienna. He told of a kind act committed by Sir Robert Keith, who through negotiation, had organised for a slave to be freed who belonged to the Palace of the King of Algiers. It is clear from Rawdon's letter that both he and his mother greatly respected Keith's action with Rawdon commenting "I am sure you must admire his character from this".[71]

Belfast clearly followed the national anti-slavery campaign, but this took on peculiar aspects in the local context closely linked to Ireland's own history. Religious influences were common to both national and local abolitionism, but while Evangelicalism and Quakerism were significant at the national level, Presbyterianism was the dominant influence behind abolitionism in Belfast.

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[68] *Belfast News-Letter*, April 3, 1792.
[69] Ibid., April 6, 1792.
[70] It was however very popular among Britain's middle classes, as anti-slavery sentiment had emerged from discourse surrounding the enlightenment, social reform and political economy, which corresponded to middle-class anxieties and aspirations. For more information see Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, (London: Verso, 1988), 295-296; Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 72-85; Drescher, *Capitalism and Anti-Slavery*, 135-161; Oldfield, *Popular Politics***,** 32-33.
[71] Letter from Lord Rawdon in Vienna to his mother the Countess of Moira. April-May 1775. Rawdon Papers, D2924/1, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Christian outlooks

Religion, as in the national campaign, was a dominant factor in Belfast's anti-slavery support, including in more radical condemnations of slavery. Thomas McCabe, a Presbyterian watchmaker, was instrumental in stopping Waddell Cunningham's 1786 plan to establish a slave-trading company in the town. McCabe was such an ardent proponent of abolition, that when he was invited to invest in Cunningham's venture, he attended the contract meeting and spoke in detail of the inhumanity and injustice he believed surrounded the trade. Furthermore, he argued that as Christians they should "forego their unholy desire to become rich by such diabolical means", and for any that would go ahead with the nefarious plan McCabe declared "May God wither the hand and consign the name to eternal infamy of the man who will sign the document."[72] Interestingly McCabe held the day.

Religious influences were an important theme in the biographies of notable local abolitionists such as William Drennan and his sister Martha. To combat the local sugar trade Drennan suggested to his sister that the women of Belfast should publish a recipe book of sugar free pies and desserts.[73] While living in Dublin in 1782, before his move back to Belfast, Drennan wrote to Martha detailing how he had helped to establish a subscription paper asking for people to abstain from using sugar, and believed he could obtain one thousand signatures.[74] Drennan's anti-slavery sentiments were influenced, like many, by Irish history and his Christian background. He was, after all, the son of the Presbyterian minister, Thomas Drennan. In his later life Drennan would touch upon his Christian beliefs and their role in his life:

> I am the son of an honest man; a minister of that gospel which breathes peace and goodwill among men a Protestant Dissenting minister, in the town of Belfast; who[se]

[72] Richard Robert Madden, *The United Irishmen, Their Lives and Times*, (Dublin: J. Madden and Company, 1846), 303.
[73] David Carson, *Transplanted to America: A Popular History of the American Covenanters to 1871*, (Pittsburgh: Board of Education and Publication of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, 1979).
[74] William Drennan and Martha McTier, *The Drennan- McTier Letters, 1776-1793*, Vol I, ed. Maria Luddy and Jean Agnew (Dublin: Womens History Project, 1998), 388.

> spirit I am accustomed to look up, in every trying situation, as my mediator and intercessor with Heaven.[75]

Drennan and his friendship group were vocal regarding Christianity and the sin of slavery, with a friend of his becoming a prominent figure within the nonconsumption campaign in Belfast. The radical Thomas Russell, an officer of the garrison in Belfast, was incredibly militant in his views surrounding the slave trade, and a prominent advocate for abolitionism. Russell was an Anglican, so while not Presbyterian like most early Belfast abolitionists, his abolitionist ideology was similar in that it came from his Christian ethics and moral ethos. Russell believed slavery went against God, and those involved used their powers and privileges to "frustrate the divine plan of liberty and justice for all".[76] Therefore, as far as Russell was concerned the slave trade was immoral.[77] As a popular figure in Belfast, particularly among those with liberal and radical views, Russell's refusal to eat sugar lent a weight of credibility to the local campaign.

Christian influence on Belfast anti-slavery sentiment was also evident in the links between local and national campaigns. In 1792, for example, the Presbyterian Ministers and Elders of the General Synod of Ulster wrote an address which was unanimously agreed to and transmitted to William Wilberforce in London. The address detailed their support for Wilberforce's abolitionist cause:

> We should think ourselves shamefully defective in our duty to God, to the world, and our own consciences, did we not come forward to bear our publick [sic] testimony against the unnatural Traffick [sic] in Human Flesh, which has so long disgraced the nations of Europe.[78]

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[75] *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, 8, No. 47, (June 1812): 433.
[76] James Quinn, *A Soul on Fire: A Life of Thomas Russell*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2002), 3.
[77] Ibid., 3.
[78] *Belfast News-Letter*, July 31, 1792.

Wilberforce's reply of gratitude was published in the *News-Letter* alongside the General Synod's address.[79]

Given the importance of the written word, literacy was a vital component in spreading anti-slavery language and thinking, both nationally and locally. Enlightenment material was freely available to purchase and was also accessible within the Belfast Reading Society, the Belfast Society for Promoting Knowledge and in private collections. That a considerable number of the town's citizens were both literate and had access to literature was largely due to the town's Presbyterians, as Scottish Presbyterian culture had long held a respect for education and reading, with many expecting literacy from the minister down.[80] This resulted in relatively high levels of child literacy, with many taught to read at home or at charitable schools. Belfast had one charitable school by 1770, which was open to the children of Lord Donegall's labourers, weavers and bleachers who were taught reading, writing and arithmetic.[81] By the turn of the century, Belfast would have many versions of the hedge school.[82] In 1795 the *News-Letter* commented on the substantial number in the town with one to be found on nearly every street, and many residents were able to send their children due to the low fees.[83] Both Christian outlooks and enlightenment support were vital in helping to promote literacy within the town which in turn helped to increase anti-slavery support. Increased literacy and access to enlightenment material would be vital in the town's growing support for both anti-slavery, and the calls for political reform.

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[79] *Belfast News-Letter*, July 31, 1792.
[80] J. R. R. Adams, *The Printed Word and the Common Man: Popular culture in Ulster, 1700-1900*, (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1987), 9.
[81] *Belfast News-Letter*, October 30, 1770; March 10, 1775.
[82] For more information on the Irish hedge schools see, in chronological order: John Coolahan, *Irish Education: Its History and Structure*, (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1981); Antonia McManus, *The Irish Hedge School and Its Books, 1695-1831*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004).
[83] *Belfast News-Letter*, April 27, 1795.

The 1790s: Growing Radicalism and anti-slavery support

In late eighteenth-century Ireland, demand for reform was prominent, particularly in the north amongst Belfast's Presbyterians.[84] Influenced by enlightenment thinking and Presbyterian ideology, the discussion surrounding natural rights and the claim that all men were equal became significantly prominent in regard to Ireland's citizens and their status. These sentiments were exacerbated further by the growing power of the Irish Volunteers who were formed to maintain order following the withdrawal of British troops to fight in the Revolutionary War. A significant proportion of Belfast's citizens were involved with the Volunteers, and while Britain lost the War in 1783 the Volunteers had gained considerable influence in the interim. Within the Belfast Volunteers, many held the view that they were serving both the Irish and British governments by maintaining order, yet they found themselves still restricted by the penal code.[85]

Following the Revolutionary War, support grew for reform, not only in Ireland but also throughout wider Britain.[86] Alongside these calls for reform, support for abolition also grew with links being made between the treatment of those abroad and at home. Belfast, which had been the crucible of Volunteering in the 70s and 80s, had members who came from an atypical form of the elite that consisted of those important within Presbyterian society. These included some clergymen and merchants who were heavily influenced by the growing liberalism in the period.[87] In 1782, the Volunteers had been successful in agitating

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[84] Edith Mary Johnston, *Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1974), 153.
[85] For more information on the Volunteers and their links to the United Irishmen see, in chronological order: Robert Day, 'The Ulster Volunteers of '82: Their Medals, Badges, &c.', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, Second Series, 4, No. 2 (Jan. 1898): 73-85; Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1981); A. T. Q. Stewart, *A Deeper Silence: The Hidden Origins of the United Irishmen*. (London: Faber& Faber. 1993); Padraig O Snodaigh, *The Irish Volunteers 1715–1793, A list of the Units*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1995); Allan Blackstock, *Double Traitors?: The Belfast Volunteers and Yeomen, 1778-1828*, (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2000).
[86] For more on British reformism in the eighteenth century see, in chronological order: J. R. Dinwiddy, *Radicalism & Reform in Britain, 1780-1850*, (London: Hambledon Press, 1992); Michael Turner, *British Politics in An Age of Reform*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes, eds., *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Nigel Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain: Religion and Politics 1714-1815*, (London: Routledge, 2014).
[87] McBride, *Isle of Slaves*, 378.

for more freedom for the Irish parliament, yet the failure to gain more significant reform in the late 1780s led to some radicals in Belfast despairing that the movement did not have the political power seen in previous years. The lack of reform combined with growing liberalism would lead to the last decade of the eighteenth century being one of the most turbulent in Ireland's history. Yet, despite this critical decade in which many prominent citizens were executed, on the run or extradited, support for abolition was still strong, particularly amongst those who were instrumental in the political upheaval of the 1790s.

Compared to the 1780s, the 1790s, in more radical circumstances, witnessed the emergence of secret societies that sought to exert particular pressure on the government. Most significantly, the Society of the United Irishmen, established in 1791, was greatly influenced by the French Revolution.[88] Belfast's liberal abolitionists, including Drennan and Russell, took oaths to join the new Society.[89] The ideology surrounding 'liberty', always a significant topic in Ireland, attracted significant support and would become a symbolic term closely associated with the group.

The society, in agitating for reform and promoting liberty for the oppressed Irish, drew on past grievances to further their agenda. In doing so, they once again brought the subject of slavery into the public arena when discussing Irishmen's situation. In this they were very effective. A significant part of their success came from the founding of the *Northern Star*, the United Irishmen newspaper, established in Belfast in January 1792. Its editor, the United Irishman Samuel Nielson, was a local merchant and son of a Presbyterian Reverend. The newspaper thrived despite the numerous fiscal and political controls placed upon the Irish press by the Irish government and would become the most remarkable newspaper to come out

[88] For more information on the French Revolution see, in chronological order: François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Foster, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Christopher Hibbert, *The French Revolution*, (London: Penguin, 1982); Paul Hanson, *Contesting the French Revolution*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); David Andress, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[89] Unfortunately, due to the United Irishmen being a secret oath bound society there are no precise figures available for membership within Belfast.

of the closing years of the eighteenth century.[90] It reflected the reformist, liberal and enlightened thinking of a selection of the town's citizens, and was incredibly popular, being circulated as far as Dublin, Edinburgh and London.[91] This was despite "its news being almost exclusively related to the North of Ireland".[92] Unsurprisingly, considering the impact enlightenment thinking had upon the town's liberals in previous decades, the newspaper was heavily influenced by the enlightenment ideals of liberty and natural rights.

The *Northern Star* was a frequent critic of slavery, both what it considered slavery at home and abroad. In July 1791, abolitionist and former slave Olaudah Equiano, also known as Gustavus Vassa, visited Belfast to promote the fourth edition of his autobiography. This visit left its mark on locals and the newspaper.[93] During his stay, Equiano lodged with Samuel Nielson, and it is evident that his stay influenced both Nielson and the *Star*, as it published a significant amount of anti-slavery material. In January 1792, Nielson published an article by Equiano that directly mentioned Irish abolitionists:

> This, with a sentiment of most profound respect, to the people of this kingdom, particularly to those who are friends of the oppressed Africans, (I having been one of the number…)…[94]

Equiano's popularity in Ireland is evident from the sale of copies his autobiography, which have been claimed to near equal those sold of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man.*[95] The *Star* was not alone in its promotion of Equiano, as the *News-Letter* also published news of his visit.[96]

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[90] Hugh Oram, *The Newspaper Book- A History of Newspapers in Ireland, 1649-1983*, (Dublin: MO Books, 1983), 41-2.
[91] Oram, *Newspaper Book*, 41-2.
[92] Ibid., 41-2.
[93] Olaudah Equiano, *Olaudah Equiano: The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. by Vincent Carretta, (London: Penguin, 2003).
[94] *Northern Star*, January 4, 1792.
[95] Rodgers, *Equiano,* 4. Paine's *Rights of Man*, was a significant political philosophy which found many fans in Ireland. Both the *Belfast News-Letter* and the *Northern Star* published excerpts from Paine's work. See: Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*: *Being an Answer to Mr Burke's attack on the French Revolution*, (London: J. S. Jordan, 1791).
[96] *Belfast News-Letter,* December 16, 1791.

From its founding in 1792, the *Star* would regularly carry articles criticising the slave trade. It published, for example, William Cowper's famous poem *The Negroe's Complaint* that highlighted the cruelties of the slave trade.[97] However, the poem was also effective in that it was dichotomous, as by drawing attention to the cruelties of slavery, it also drew attention to the barbarity and hypocrisy of England being directly involved. Another piece in the same edition as *The Negroe's Complaint*, criticised Britain and demonstrated that the emotions and memories surrounding the treatment of Ireland's citizens were still current: "…a wretched band of slaves, mouldering under these bad laws…if our recollection were not kept alive by what we suffer…and the events, from whence we date our bondage." [98]

The *Star* went further than any other local publication in linking the situation of slaves with the standing of the Irish.[99] Such connections were developed in editorials and readers' letters:

> If we have a crime it is to have leapt over our chains…
> We claim as of right the benefit of open trial and candid discussion;
> when overpowered by the administration of an extensive Empire, the *British* Senate did not refuse its attention to the unfortunate exiles of Africa…
> That is loyalty which strong temptations could never alienate. [100]

Each of these editorials, makes clear how convoluted the issue of the African slave trade and the Irish sense of slavery was.

The 1790s also continued some of the themes of the 1780s. Many articles demonstrated the humanity of slaves by using emotive stories or scientific reasoning to demonstrate that they were not inferior to Europeans, and that 'slaves' when shown kindness could make good servants or soldiers. In 1790 the *News-Letter* published an article reporting

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[97] *Northern Star*, January 4, 1792.
[98] Ibid., January 4, 1792.
[99] John Morley, *Edmund Burke: A Historical Study*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1867), 190.
[100] *Northern Star*, January 4, 1792.

a story that had apparently taken place during the Revolutionary War. A slave followed his master, who was a colonel, during a difficult march. Seeing the colonel becoming fatigued the slave apparently claimed "Master, you suffer great deal, but you fight for liberty; me too suffer with patience, if me have liberty to defend."[101] The master apparently set the slave free at that moment and had not since had a more zealous defender. The article aimed to inspire the freedom of slaves, however it did argue that even if freedom was granted willingly, there was still condemnation for enslavement in the first instance, "There is no example of a negro having returned ingratitude for the gift of liberty. They are not, however, ignorant, that you only restore that of which you had no right to deprive them."[102] Again, the concept of natural rights and liberty were a focal point for Belfast abolitionist support.

Belfast's growing political divisions in the 1790s between conservatives and liberals did not dampen enthusiasm for abolitionism.[103] In April 1792, the more conservative *News-Letter* noted:

> The abolition of the slave trade to the Isle of St. Thomas, in the course of ten years…will necessarily make the planters kinder and more indulgent to those they may purchase in the mean time…This holds to an excellent example to other countries…[104]

Examples of similar reportage in the *News-Letter* abound. Another instance is an article relating to an event which took place in Christianburgh, Africa. A black African did not repay a debt, and in accordance with the area's laws, his creditor was able to sell him to fulfil the debt. The enslaved man's son arrived at his father's prison and berated his father for not selling him instead, as was allowed. The father refused, but the son was able to convince the creditor to enslave him in place of his father. The story quickly spread, and the son was later purchased and freed by the Governor who had been informed of the loving

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[101] *Belfast News-Letter*, July 9, 1790.
[102] Ibid., July 9, 1790.
[103] Ibid., April 6-April 10, 1792; April 10-April 13, 1792.
[104] Ibid., April 10-April 13, 1792.

son's actions.[105] The large volume of these articles demonstrates the recurring themes in the Belfast press of stories relating to the treatment of slaves. This was true of the liberal *Northern Star* and of the more conservative *News-Letter*. In this regard Belfast is a local example of a more general trend: in the 1790s a selection of Irish newspapers regularly published information relating to the debates in Britain on the slave trade, and criticised the slave trade and the treatment of slaves.[106]

In the 1790s relations between the United Irishmen and the Irish government became even more acrimonious. Increasing radicalism led to personnel changes, with people such as Drennan drawing away, leaving the remaining members who were more radical in their demands. The balance in the newspaper's coverage between the global slave trade and local slaves tipped in favour of the latter. The *Star* chose not to publish an essay by Thomas Russell, for example, in which he criticised the slave trade. Samuel Nielson, wrote that while the newspaper was inspired "with the principles of general liberty" and was not "insensible to the sufferings of any part of the human race", there were over "three million slaves in our native land" and they were ultimately the newspaper's priority.[107] For some, the perceived issue of slavery at home remained the dominant topic, while others, such as Russell, were able to recognise the perceived sufferings of those at home, while simultaneously recognising and criticising the treatment of slaves abroad. For those like Russell, their Christian ideology allowed them to despair at both. Only a few months prior to his essay being sent to the *Star*, a similar letter was published in the *News-Letter* and was signed, 'G', leading some historians, such as Seamus Mac Giolla Easpaig, to believe it may have been Russell that authored the letter.[108]

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[105] *Belfast News-Letter*, July 17, 1792.
[106] *Finns Leinster Journal*, April 27, 1791; December 24, 1790; September 24, 1791; *Freemans Journal*, December 9, 1790; December 23, 1794; *Dublin Evening Post*, March 19, 1796; May 17, 1798.
[107] *Northern Star*, March 10, 1792; Seamus N. Mac Giolla Easpaig, *Tomas Ruiséil*, (Baile Atha Cliath: Clo Morainn, 1957), 56. Also see: Quinn, *A Soul on Fire*, 4, 61-3.
[108] *Belfast News-Letter*, December 2, 1791; Mac Giolla Easpaig, *Tomas Ruiséil*, 52.

Despite anti-slavery supporters, at times preferring to publicise the 'slaves' at home, the subject still remained constant, even if being used to draw attention to their own plight. Wolfe Tone's invasion manifesto of 1796 *An Address to the People of Ireland*, in which he asked for support, addressed his feelings surrounding slavery:

> We reprobate and abhor the idea, that political inequality should result from religious opinions; and we should be ashamed, at the moment when we are seeking liberty for ourselves, to acquiesce in any system founded on the slavery of others.[109]

Once again, support for abolition was defended by those who saw a connection to the treatment experienced by many within Ireland.

The late 1790s witnessed considerable change in Belfast's politics and press regarding its previous moral position of natural rights when discussing both African slavery and Irish 'slaves'. This was a direct consequence of local growing radicalism and the government's growing suppression of its critics.[110] In 1797 the *Northern Star* ceased publication as the government moved against the United Irishmen. The *News-Letter* also saw changes when in 1795 its long-term editor Henry Joy sold the paper to two Scots, who sought government support to halt the newspaper's decline. Following the sale of the paper it became significantly more conservative in what it published. However, it needs to be remembered that the government placed vast pressure on Irish newspapers in the 1790s. Brian Inglis has discussed this difficult period for the press, observing that when the government believed it was being criticised, it could use its authority and powers to make criticism dangerous, and therefore a

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[109] Henry Joy, *Historical collections relative to the town of Belfast: from the earliest period to the union with Great Britain*, (Belfast: George Berwick, 1817), 380.

[110] For more information regarding the United Irishmen and the failed 1798 rebellion see, in chronological order: A. T. Q. Stewart, *A Deeper Silence: Hidden Origins of the United Irishmen*, (London: Faber& Faber. 1993); Kevin Whelan, *The Fellowship of Freedom: United Irishmen and 1798*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998); Nancy J. Curtin, *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Fergus Whelan, *Dissent into Treason: Unitarians, King-killers and the Society of United Irishmen*, (Dublin: Brandon Press, 2010).

"state of censorship virtually existed."[111] While historians such as Richard Madden have described the *News-Letter* as "steady in its anti-liberal, anti-Catholic, anti-national sentiments",[112] Inglis argues that they are wrong and the newspaper was not anti-liberal but trying to simply survive in a difficult political climate.[113]

Despite the significant changes taking place in the town, alongside substantial government pressure and growing conservatism, abolition remained a common topic. In October 1797, only five months after the suppression of the *Northern Star*, the *News-Letter* published an article discussing how slavery is degrading to all:

> Slavery is alike, degrading to the goat and the lion. The one if taken from his native deserts, the other if exiled from his mountainous retreat, is deprived of every trait of characteristic physiognomy [and] no longer grouped in that grand delineation of nature, where all is life…[114]

Reports relating to abolition, not only in Britain but beyond, were reported in the press.[115] In the immediate years prior to the Act of Union, the *News-Letter* often published news relating to the restlessness of slaves in slave plantations and subsequent failed slave insurrections.[116] The newspaper was often highly critical of the violence committed by the insurrectionists, believing that violence was never an answer nor the way to gain freedom. The newspaper's stance did follow the theme of its closer relationship to the Irish government and the

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[111] Inglis, *Freedom of the Press*, 228.
[112] Richard Robert Madden, *The History of Irish Periodical Literature, from the End of the 17th to the Middle of the 19th Century: Its Origin, Progress and Results*, Volume 2, (London: T. C. Newby, 1867), 211.
[113] Instead Inglis argues that the News-Letter was influenced by the ideology surrounding natural rights, which affected the Volunteers and the United Irishmen. As such the newspaper took a favourable view of the French revolution, until the King's trial in December 1792. For more information see Inglis, *Freedom of the Press*, 69.
[114] *Belfast News-Letter*, October 20, 1797.
[115] Ibid., May 24, 1799.
[116] Ibid., February 16, 1795; March 23, 1795; March 16, 1798.

government attempting to squash uprisings that would threaten its control. At times however, the paper defended the actions of the slaves':

> …it must be obvious to every person not blinded by prejudice or a mistaken interest, that, had the abolition of the slave trade, and the emancipation of the Negroes been hastened, when first brought forward in Parliament, in the late conflicts, instead of raising their hands against their Task-masters, the Blacks would have bled and died for them as friends.[117]

Liberty, both at home and abroad, remained a prominent topic, despite the changes that had taken place in the town due to the failed rebellion of the United Irishmen and the government suppression of its membership. Despite the increasing power of the Irish government the *News-Letter* could be seen promoting libertarian thinking. Its promotion was always quite obscure in how it was phrased so that it did not appear that the paper supported the actions of the United Irishmen, and therefore attract the wrath of the government. In 1798, the *News-Letter* published an article addressed to the Irish people by the Swiss philosopher John Caspar Lavater, in which he argued that the invasion by the French, organised by the United Irishmen, could not bring liberty to Ireland. Instead Lavater argued that Ireland would only have swopped one master for another. In this article the *News-Letter* makes clear that if the United Irish uprising had been successful the Society could not have provided true liberty, however while the path to liberty may have changed, Irishmen still sought it. While in some ways the town saw changes in its mentalité with radicalism largely stamped out, liberty and natural rights remained popular topics for many citizens and within the press. Support for abolition was no different, as for decades it had been entwined with the town's own demands for political reform, equality and liberty. With such a strong connection to their recent history, it is no surprise that the town's anti-slavery sentiment carried into the new century.

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[117] *Belfast News-Letter*, May 1, 1795.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Belfast's anti-slavery sentiment was impacted and influenced by different issues which arose in the eighteenth century. A dominant theme is the role played by perceptions of the Irish as slaves or in a slave-like condition and how this issue was viewed in Belfast. The town was in an awkward position in this period as while Ireland was part of Britain, with Belfast having strong trade connections with Britain, the Irish still had their own identity of which they were very defensive. Unlike the national anti-slavery campaign, local anti-slavery sentiment was greatly influenced by the claims that the Irish were also slaves and treated as such by the British and Irish governments. Discussion surrounding the perceived differences between the Irish and British is not new regarding the study of Irish history and its tumultuous history, particularly in regard to the 'inferior Irish', with Catholicism seen as the badge of the inferior race.[118] Yet, the study of the Irish as slaves in regard to local abolitionism has not before received the prominence it clearly deserves.

Perceptions of 'the Irish as slaves' greatly influenced abolitionists in Belfast. This perception may have been exaggerated and even unjustified, but it was nevertheless felt. Many in Belfast knew that they were not mistreated to the same degree as the slaves trapped in the chattel slave system, and this was reflected in local newspaper articles.[119] Yet, there was recognition of a form of degrees of slavery. That they were not treated as harshly, for them, did not detract from the fact that they believed themselves to be trapped on a scale of slavery.

Local factors played themselves out with due recognition to national concerns and campaigns. We have noted, for example, how Wilberforce was frequently praised for his abolitionism while simultaneously criticised for blindness to slavery in Ireland. Poems and stories by British abolitionists were regularly published with support demonstrated for the British campaign. However, unlike the British campaign which had dedicated societies and groups, Belfast abolitionism was fractured with no dedicated anti-slavery committees or

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[118] George D. Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 56.
[119] *Belfast News-Letter*, February 1, 1788.

societies. Instead support existed within the local press, local groups, the General Synod of Ulster and specific individuals who were respected within the town such as Thomas McCabe and Thomas Russell.

This chapter has also noted how the Scottish Enlightenment in particular, and the enlightenment more generally, were significant in Belfast abolitionism, especially in regard to the ideology surrounding the 'Irish slaves'. Presbyterianism was at the core of the Scottish Enlightenment, and this travelled into Belfast's predominantly Presbyterian community. With many of its clergy educated in Glasgow and endowed with liberal ideology, it is not surprising that liberty and equality were cornerstones of the town's anti-slavery views and politics.

Belfast's eighteenth-century anti-slavery sentiment was affected by its own local history, alongside Presbyterianism, the Scottish Enlightenment and the national campaign. All played key roles in the creation and development of abolitionism in Belfast. Also contributing was the growing radicalism of the 1790s which provided a more radical support of abolition. Yet the growing radicalism of the decade had significant consequences in the late 1790s and which resulted in growing conservatism and the Act of Union in 1801. Despite these changes, abolition remained a prominent topic within the town's press, and this would be carried over into the new century. However, just as changes would be seen in the political ideology of the town's citizens, changes would also be seen in the town's abolitionist sentiment. Consequently, abolition would be influenced by the wider ramifications surrounding the closer ties between Belfast and Britain.

Chapter Two

"Go ruthless Avarice": Abolitionism in nineteenth century Georgian Belfast

Anti-slavery is a prominent topic among historians of the nineteenth century with numerous studies completed regarding Britain and the popular demand for abolition.[1] However, in regard to anti-slavery support in Ireland, and particularly the North, there is a relative paucity of interest.[2] Previously, studies on Belfast concentrated on the turbulent events of the twentieth century or the period in the late nineteenth century when unionism first "emerged as an organised electoral force".[3] However, in the last twenty years Belfast during the 1800s has attracted increased attention from historians.[4] That nineteenth century Belfast is now gaining more academic attention is most welcome, as Ireland in this period was a melting pot of issues, including Catholic emancipation and Home Rule, following the closure of the Irish legislature in 1801.

Nineteenth century Belfast benefitted greatly from the Act of Union, which brought great prosperity to the town and its industries.[5] A stronger relationship also grew between Belfast and Britain due to ever closer ties and as a result, many of its citizens described themselves as British. The travel writer H. D. Inglis went so far as noting that 1830s Belfast had "little or nothing in common with the rest of Ireland".[6] This development of 'Britishness' is in direct opposition to Belfast in the late eighteenth century when it was seen as a hub of radical activity due to the Volunteers and United Irishmen's demands for

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[1] For these various studies see, see in chronological order: Drescher, Econocide; James Walvin, *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Origins and Effects in Europe, Africa and the Americas*, (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1981); Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*; Oldfield, *Popular Politics*; Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning.*

[2] See, in chronological order: Rodgers, *Equiano*; Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery*; Kinealy, *Daniel O'Connell and the anti-slavery movement*; Ritchie, 'Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism'.

[3] Bew, *Glory of Being Britons*, 1.

[4] See, in chronological order: Christine Kinealy and Gerard MacAtasney, *The Hidden Famine: Hunger, Poverty and Sectarianism in Belfast 1840-50*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000); Hirst, *Religion, Politics and Violence*; Bew, *Glory of Being Britons*; Wright, *The 'Natural Leaders'*; Hughes, *The Scots in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast.*

[5] Philip Ollerenshaw, *Banking in Nineteenth Century Ireland*, 1-3.

[6] Ibid., 1.

political reform.[7] Later the demand for the separation of Britain and Ireland was made by the Society of the United Irishmen, a nationwide radical organisation which had prominent members in Belfast. Yet, in less than ten years the town saw dramatic political and social changes. Recent studies have begun to focus upon these changes, particularly the growing support for the union and conservatism within the town, alongside the spread of religious intolerance.[8]

Much needed investigations are now taking place regarding the developing changes in Belfast in the early nineteenth century. Yet, there have been limited studies on nineteenth century Belfast anti-slavery support, and none regarding the developments of anti-slavery sentiment in Belfast's Georgian period and the evolution of its anti-slavery movement. This chapter will therefore look at the anti-slavery sentiment in the town prior to the reign of Queen Victoria. Key questions of this chapter are: Did the developments in Belfast's politics affect its anti-slavery sentiment? Did the national anti-slavery campaign/campaigners influence anti-slavery support in Belfast? What organisations and/or publications pursued an anti-slavery agenda? Who were the individuals involved? Did the ideology of the 'Irish slaves' find a way into nineteenth century Belfast anti-slavery sentiment? Economic development and ever deepening connections between Britain and Belfast were significant developments in Belfast during the nineteenth century. This chapter will demonstrate that a combination of local and national contexts influenced anti-slavery sentiment in Belfast in the early nineteenth century.

Belfast politics and anti-slavery sentiment: What changes followed the Act of Union?

In the eighteenth-century, Belfast saw improved trade connections with Britain which benefitted its growing industries,[9] yet its citizens possessed a unique identity of which they

[7] For more on growing support for Britishness in Belfast see: Bew, *Glory of being Britons*.
[8] For these various studies see, in chronological order: Gibbon, *The Origins of Ulster Unionism*; Hirst, *Religion, Politics and Violence*; Hepburn, 'Prisoners of the City', 7-37.
[9] Improved trade links between Belfast and Britain were due to England's concession to Irish free trade in 1779. For more information on Irish trade see: Louis M. Cullen, *Anglo-Irish Trade, 1660-1800,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968).

were very defensive.[10] In the 1790s, the town saw both increased liberalism and tensions, due to the radicalism that had overtaken the United Irishmen from 1794 onwards. However, following the Act of Union in 1801, a new dynamic was formed which altered the relationship between Ireland and Britain and saw Belfast become more tightly linked with Britain. This is idiosyncratic, as in less than fifty years the town went from liberal in its outlook to increasingly conservative and supportive of the ever-closer relationship between Britain and itself. From the mid-eighteenth century, the town's anti-slavery sentiment had been influenced by several themes, with the most prominent being the anger directed towards the ascendancy and the British and Irish governments. Yet, the changes taking place in the town in the early nineteenth century meant that the town's anti-slavery sentiment had to survive within Belfast's changing political and social landscape.

When the Act of Union came into force in 1801 it amalgamated the Irish parliament with Westminster. The Act was seen to give more rights to Dissenters and better connections to Britain, thereby it was believed to weaken the powerful Ascendancy. Due to the changes brought in by the Act many citizens began to believe that political reform would be introduced into Ireland. As a result, a growing number of liberal Presbyterians, such as former United Irishman William Drennan, supported the Union. This was a dramatic turnaround as less than ten years previously a selection of citizens had demanded significant reform, with the more radical citizens calling for the separation of Britain and Ireland. One glaring reason for the changes in opinion among some, was due to many citizens beginning to see the booming Ulster economy as a benefit of the Union.[11] However, following 1801 significant religious tensions developed among sections of the town's citizens. This tension was due to a growing number of citizens believing that the Union was a form of protection

[10] This unique identity was due to Belfast being a predominantly Presbyterian town in a Roman Catholic country that was governed by the minority members of the Established Church. While not as severe as the laws affecting the country's Catholics, Presbyterians were impacted by the penal code and as a result of their numbers, the town found itself a hotbed of radical activity with aims for reform.

[11] Stephen Tierney, *Accommodating National Identity: New Approaches in International and Domestic Law*, (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2000), 234.

from Catholic radicals, such as supporters of the sectarian Defenders or the radical, Daniel O'Connell, who if successful, they feared would establish the Catholic Church in Ireland. For the small Catholic population in the town however, there was considerable anger regarding the Act as it did not contain Catholic emancipation which had been promised by the British Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger.[12] Despite these growing tensions and the changes seen in the local social and political sphere, one area where support appeared to remain steady was abolition.

In Belfast, support for abolition was not a recent development, as it had attracted followers for decades. Despite the United Irishmen losing the backing of many citizens within the town in the 1790s, (a result of the society's increasing radical agenda), the organisation's support of abolition was common among those who did not share the same political nor religious views. In the early years of the nineteenth century abolitionism remained a popular topic within the Belfast press, even after the suppression of the *Northern Star* in 1797. The early years saw growing support for the cause in the town, not limited to the growing liberal press but also among the more traditionally conservative papers including the *Belfast News-Letter*. While the *News-Letter* was now aimed more towards the conservatives in the town – unlike in the 1790s – it had long held an anti-slavery stance which had first become apparent in the 1770s. The 1800s would see the paper publish a number of abolitionist material. Coverage of William Wilberforce's attempts to pass a Bill banning the British slave trade frequently made it into the paper's columns, however the paper did not rely purely on coverage of Wilberforce's attempts.[13] In July 1806, it published an article regarding the sale of slaves in Charleston, South Carolina.[14] First published in a

[12] William Pitt the Younger had promised Catholic emancipation however George III refused to allow it as he believed it went against his coronation oath to uphold Protestantism. His refusal led to Pitt resigning. See: Jonathan Bardon, "The Act of Union." *Act of Union Virtual Library*, (http://www.actofunion.ac.uk/actofunion.htm) (accessed January 19 2018); James H. Murphy, *Abject Loyalty: Nationalism and Monarchy in Ireland During the Reign of Queen Victoria*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Press of America, 2001), 3.
[13] *Belfast News-Letter*, June 8, 1804.
[14] Ibid., July 11, 1806.

Charleston newspaper, the article tells of how in a space of fifteen days, over 750 slaves were sold. Typical of the *News-Letter*, the article is critical of slavery:

> Let it be noted too, how ingenious avarice has given a new range to depredation. The *western* coast of Africa is no longer able to glut their "cursed thirst of gold."… It is a folly to dwell upon the immortality, injustice and crying sin of this abominable traffic; but is it not surprising that avarice should be a stronger principle than self-preservation?[15]

The article went on to state that by buying in slaves who they would abuse, the South Carolinians were in effect creating an army that would only turn against them in time. That the newspaper would publish an article so abolitionist in tone highlights its sentiments in the period leading up to the 1807 Slave Trade Act.

While the *News-Letter* was willing to publish the abuse of slaves by other countries, as seen in its article criticising the sale of slaves in Charleston, the British were not exempt, despite the closer ties between the town and Britain. In July 1802, the paper published an article which criticised the role of previous parliaments in the slave trade and mentioning once again the animosity of the slaves:

> Does there exist at this moment any national crime, tolerated, if not encouraged by antecedent Parliaments yet surpassing in palpable heinousness all ordinary bounds and measures of guilt? There exists the Slave Trade. Convinced by irresistible proof of its enormous barbarity and. incurable injustice; compelled to acknowledge that this traffic is itself a source of the unceasing wars, of the iniquitous laws, of the unwearied fraud and rapine by which it is supplied… that it brutalizes to a degree scarcely to be conceived the minds of Englishmen engaged in it… it has been the grand source of

[15] *Belfast News-Letter*, July 11, 1806.

> insurrection and internal danger in our colonies, by furnishing a constant accession of Slaves recently deprived of. liberty, and panting, for revenge.[16]

The British abolition campaign, which had significant support in Belfast in the eighteenth century, was gaining traction both in parliament and among the wider public. Belfast's continued support of the campaign was seen regularly in its press. In February 1807, a month before the passage of the Slave Trade Bill, the *News-Letter* highlighted its anti-slavery views with the publication of a poem authored by a local citizen, titled *"*The Abolition of the Slave Trade":

> Methinks I see grim Slavery's Gorgon form,
> Like one condemn'd for Foulest crimes, aghast,
> Writhing with inward agony' pent storm,
> To hear her sentence by stern justice past.
>
> Methinks, too, Mercy's angel shape I see,
> Wiping the tear from misery's furrow'd cheek,
> While Freedom ratifies the just decree,
> That fell Oppression's shackles soon shall break.
>
> Humanity, in triumph, lifts her voice-
> To Heaven the prayer of Piety ascends-
> With holy fervour all the good rejoice,
> While the poor NEGRO'S persecution ends.
>
> Go, ruthless Avarice! Lament thy loss,

[16] *Belfast News-Letter,* July 9, 1802.

Forbidden to pursue the barbarous trade,
Thou who count'st Man, compar'd with gold as dross,
When in thy balance of Injustice weigh'd!

Yes, howl thy savage! Drawn are thy fell fangs:
No longer mayst thou torture, wound, and kill:
No longer mock the frantic captive's pangs,
Torn from his native Land his fields to till!

AFRICA! Exult through all thy vast domain,
From Niger's fount to Nile's sea-mingled flood-
Britain magnanimously rends the chain,
Bathed in such torrent as thy tears and blood!

For you, who urg'd her to the righteous deed,
Time shall inscribe your honours on his urn:
While grateful Nations from Oppression freed,
Their ferrent blessings pour, their ceaseless thanks return.[17]

The emotive poem appealed to the paper's outlook on slavery. The first stanza displayed the disgust that the poet felt towards slavery as he compared it to having the form of a gorgon (a mythical monster) and this disgust only grows throughout the poem. Another topic the poem touched upon is the role played by greed or "ruthless Avarice" in human slavery. The subject of greed and its relation to the slave trade were well known in Belfast in the eighteenth century, as in 1786 several citizens sought to establish a slave-trading company, which was subsequently denied. Thomas McCabe, a prominent citizen, declared that the

[17] *Belfast News-Letter,* February 6, 1807.

men involved should "forego their unholy desire to become rich by such diabolical means".[18] Another line in the poem "Thou who count'st Man, compar'd with gold as dross", ties in with the enlightenment ideology, popular in the late eighteenth century, that men were born with natural rights and therefore those rights could not be forcibly removed with gold. During the period in which this poem was published, there were ongoing issues in Belfast such as demands by Catholics for emancipation which was not provided to them under the Act of Union. Due to these being local issues it would be assumed that they would dominate local headlines and columns, which they often did. However, despite growing division in the town due to topics such as Catholic emancipation, which was evident in a selection of newspapers in the period, it remains clear that there was still significant support for abolition.[19]

Alongside the continued support of abolition, there were notable changes taking place in the town. Following the 1798 rebellion, the repression by the Irish and British governments upon the press was considerable. Furthermore, numerous relationships between those who had once been members of the society broke down. Citizens who partook in roles – such as medicine – that were considered beneficial to the social and welfare services within Belfast were also significantly affected by the growing repression following the rebellion. An example of this is that following the failed uprising, any citizens on the Board of the Belfast Charitable Society and Belfast Poor House who had been connected to the United Irishmen were removed from their positions. Those removed – including the anti-slavery supporter William Drennan – were no longer allowed any involvement with the society or poor house.[20] This was despite a number of these citizens having distanced themselves from the society years before the 1798 rebellion, due to their growing distaste for

[18] Richard Robert Madden, *The United Irishmen, Their Lives and Times*, (Dublin: J. Madden and Company, 1846), 303.
[19] *Belfast News-Letter*, April 10, 1810; March 9, 1813; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, May 6, 1812; June 9, 1817.
[20] Drennan had been completing vital work as he had begun his inoculation programme within Clifton Street Poor House during this period. 'Minute Books', 1798-1810, Clifton House Papers, Clifton House Archive, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

its increasing radicalism. Despite their criticism for the later actions of the society these citizens, including Drennan, continued to hold liberal ideals and support liberal causes in the years following the Act of Union.

In the nineteenth century many in Belfast had moved on from the radicalism of the 1790s, yet there still existed some form of the old liberal ideology. In 1808 William Drennan founded and edited the *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, which was liberal in its outlook and explored the links between Ireland and other parts of the world.[21] Due to its liberal foundations and its founder's past support of abolition, there were numerous editorials discussing the evils of slavery.[22] In 1808, the *Monthly Magazine* published an editorial criticising George Washington's personal ownership of slaves.[23] Significantly, many radicals and liberals in eighteenth century Belfast had admired Washington for staging war on Britain during the American War of Independence and fighting for the Colony's liberty. Yet, these same liberals believed Washington was still open for criticism due to his support of slavery.

Alongside the *Monthly Magazine*, another newly established Belfast newspaper also demonstrated its stance regarding slavery and the slave trade.[24] The *Belfast Commercial Chronicle* – aimed towards those involved in the commercial sectors of the town – frequently published articles related to slavery and the slave trade, with poetry a popular tool of Belfast anti-slavery supporters.[25] Poetry in this period was a powerful political form and had been since the English Renaissance.[26] Often used for protest politics, it is understandable

[21] For more information on Belfast's newspapers see: Appendix 2.
[22] *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, December 1, 1808; January 31, 1812; February 28, 1810; July 31, 1814.
[23] Ibid., December 1, 1808; October 1, 1808.
[24] While eighteenth-century Belfast saw the formation of a small number of newspapers, many did not last longer than three or four years, bar the *News-Letter* and the *Northern Star*. The nineteenth century however, would see the formation of a substantial number of newspapers and magazines within the town. For more on Belfast's press see, in chronological order: Brian Inglis, *Freedom of the Press in Ireland 1784-1841*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1954); Hugh Oram, *The Newspaper Book- A History of Newspapers in Ireland, 1649-1983*, (Dublin: MO Books, 1983).
[25] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, September 18, 1805; June 25, 1806, 4.
[26] For information on Poetry and the English Renaissance see: David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

why it became a popular form for the anti-slavery cause.[27] In 1805 the *Chronicle* published a poem in which it criticised the hypocrisy of the trade: "Proud Christians, who boast of their civilisation, Go far beyond Pagans in cruelty's art…".[28] Emotive imagery of the slave trade was highly effective within several newspapers. One reactionary comment in the *Chronicle* spoke of a slave's skin being black because "they are in mourning for their captivity".[29] Other articles included news from London that told of the excessive cruelties by which a Negro suffered and a poem speaking of liberty and views on avarice.[30] The rhetoric within the *Chronicle* is highly similar to that used both in the previous century and in the poem "The Abolition of the Slave Trade" published in the conservative *News-Letter*.

While Belfast's newspapers were vocal in their support for abolition, it was not limited to the press. The Marquess of Abercorn was a significant supporter of the attempts to end the slave trade in the early nineteenth century. In 1806 Abercorn drafted a speech calling for an end to the slave trade and mentioned his support of the cause in personal letters:

> My principles, which I believe are just what they were upon all subjects, are upon none the more steady than upon the slave trade…it [is] a duty to God and man to hold in abomination the principles trafficking in human blood and misery…[31]

Clearly, abolitionist sentiment was infiltrating all levels of local society.

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[27] For more information on British poetry and its use in the nineteenth century see: Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poets and Politics*, (London: Routledge, 2002). There are a significant number of publications regarding anti-slavery poetry. See: Marcus Wood ed., *The Poetry of Slavery: An Anglo-American Anthology, 1764-1865*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Edith Hall, Richard Alston, Justine McConnell, eds., *Ancient Slavery and Abolition: From Hobbes to Hollywood*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
[28] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, September 18, 1805.
[29] Ibid., June 28, 1806.
[30] Ibid., July 16, 1806; July 16, 1806; *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, July 12, 1806.
[31] *Marquess of Abercorn to William Wilberforce*, 1804, Abercorn Papers, D/623/A/82/33, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland; *Draft for a speech on the abolition of the slave trade*, 1806, Abercorn Papers, D/623/A/233/76A, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.

The news of the passing of the 1807 Slave Trade Act saw significant support in the town's press.[32] However, for some it did not go far enough nor was not as successful as it had been hoped. In April the *News-Letter* discussed how the Act had had a negligible effect in Jamaica:

> The abolition of the slave trade had produced a great and general sensation. It does not appear, however, to have given any check to the ordinary rigour of the planters – the papers still overflow with advertisements for fugitive slaves, and the professed slave brokers seem to have industriously availed themselves of the circumstances of the abolition to double their price.[33]

It is no surprise that with the town's press having been vocal regarding the campaign for the abolition of the slave trade, that a selection of citizens and the town's press would be supportive of full slave emancipation following the 1807 Act. In 1816 frequent mention was made in the *Chronicle* of the "Friends of civil & religious liberty"[34]. The society spoke not only on the liberation of slaves from slavery but on the topic of liberty itself which remained a popular theme from the eighteenth century.[35] The *News-Letter* also frequently spoke of the treatment of slaves, and in 1819 criticised the treatment of slaves in the United States. Of particular focus in this article was the interference encountered by the slaves when they wished to partake in religious services: "That such feelings and practices should among men, who know the value of liberty, and profess to understand its principles, is the consummation of wickedness."[36]

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[32] *Belfast New-Letter*, May 8, 1807; May 26, 1807; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, April 13, 1807; July 27, 1807.
[33] *Belfast News-Letter,* April 28, 1807.
[34] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle,* January 6, 1816.
[35] Discussion often revolved around the abolition of slavery and other issues such as the treatment of the Huguenots in France following the French Revolution. See: *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, May 22, 1816; May 24, 1817.
[36] *Belfast News-Letter,* April 23, 1819.

Alongside the press's anti-slavery sentiment, there was also significant local anti-slavery agitation. In 1818, the *News-Letter* was involved in an unusual incident when it published an article which first appeared in the *Chronicle*, in which it claimed a fifteen-year-old slave girl landed in Belfast with her masters who regularly abused her. The papers reported that when the slave found out she was free in Ireland she attempted to hide from her masters, but she was soon caught and placed on a ship in Belfast port, intended for Jamaica. The incident cause such a furore that the Sovereign had to intercede and demanded the girl was brought before him. It was soon ascertained that the story was not wholly correct as the girl had left Belfast willingly, however the reaction the story received among the town's citizens demonstrates the ill feeling towards slavery and slave owners in Belfast.[37]

During the 1820s, criticism of slavery remained popular with the town.[38] This took place at a critical time in the town socially and politically due to the growing social issues taking place due to religion and population increase. In the years since the Act of Union Belfast and its inhabitants had changed insurmountably. Jonathan Wright has stated that the influx of young men from the country transformed the town's middle classes, and that a generational shift occurred. This then allowed for a selection of these ambitious young men to reach the top of Belfast society.[39] Both liberals (reformist/progressive/libertarian) and conservatives (traditional/conventional/right-wing) gained in strength from these changes.[40]

The rising support for conservative views was particularly seen in the 1820s, when the population increase in the period helped to further antagonise relations within the town, and religiously divided areas became more prominent. These included the Pound area of Belfast, which was classed as a Catholic stronghold by the mid-1830s, however its links with the Catholic community went back a decade earlier with many recent Catholic arrivals

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[37] *Belfast News-Letter*, June 23, 1818.
[38] Ibid., June 4, 1822; November 9, 1824; June 19, 1827; March 25, 182; June 13, 1828; September 5, 1828; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, December 14, 1825; March 27, 1826; May 17, 1826; January 28, 1828.
[39] Wright, *The 'Natural Leaders',* 39.
[40] When this chapter discusses the towns traditionalists and liberals the lowercase terms conservatives/liberals will be used. If used in relation to the Liberal party (Whigs) or the Conservative party (Tories) then it will be capitalised.

settling in the area. Many Catholics were attracted to the area due to the easy access to the town's mills and walking distance to the two Catholic Churches, St Mary's and St Patrick's.[41] The growing tension is evident throughout the town's press and was blatant in an article in the *News-Letter* published in 1828. The article gave details of a Roman Catholic meeting in Co. Antrim in which attendees discussed a petition seeking Catholic emancipation.[42] The enmity shown in the article for Catholics gaining emancipation is surprising, particularly considering the cordial relationship that had previously existed between the town's Catholics and Dissenters.[43] The *News-Letter*'s response to the petition mocked the term "emancipation" being used to describe Catholics in Ireland:

> The very phrase Emancipation necessarily supposes a pre-existing state of slavery which in relation to the Catholics of Ireland is both unintelligible in theory and false in fact…not even Dan. O'Connell seriously believes they are enslaved.[44]

Ironically, while critical of emancipation for Ireland's Roman Catholics, support for anti-slavery remained as prominent as in previous years. In the same year that the newspaper published the article criticising Catholic emancipation, the *News-Letter* published anti-slavery material criticising the very idea of slavery as it went against a person's born liberty.[45]

In the 1820s, demands became more frequent for the abolition of slavery in its entirety throughout the British empire. This caused debate as there were a large number of

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[41] Hirst, *Religion, Politics and Violence,* 14.
[42] *Belfast News-Letter,* January 8, 1828.
[43] In 1784 the first Roman Catholic chapel was built in Crooked Lane. Its construction was supported by the Presbyterians of the town. One the day it opened, members of the local Volunteers marched in full dress to the chapel where more money was gifted to the Chapel, to aid in the expense of paying for the new mass house. Money was also donated again thirty-one years later to build the second Catholic Chapel, St Patrick's, in 1815. *Belfast News-Letter,* May 30, 1784; P. Rogers, *The Story of Old St Mary's,* (Belfast: np, 1955); F. Heatley, *The story of St. Patricks, Belfast, 1815-1977,* (Portglenone: Bethlehem Abbey Press, 1977); B. Colgan, *St Mary's, Chapel Lane,* (Belfast: np, 1984).
[44] *Belfast News-Letter,* January 8, 1828.
[45] Ibid., December 5, 1828.

businesses throughout Britain that would be affected by the ending of the slave trade. The publishers of the *Chronicle*, due to it being aimed towards the town's businessmen, would have been very aware that the end of slavery could affect local businessmen who traded in products such as sugar and cotton. Despite this however, the paper frequently published abolitionist material in the 1820s.[46] Furthermore, support was not only seen in the town's press. In 1826 the *Chronicle* published an article in relation to an anti-slavery petition, created by a local citizen, that was currently making its way through Belfast. The *Chronicle* was highly supportive of such a venture writing, "we trust it will be generally signed by our fellow townsmen…[and will have] the effect of producing more effectual measures for the…emancipation of this much injured and deeply suffering portion of the human race".[47]

Public support remained prominent throughout the late 1820s. Articles not only expressed anger towards slavery but also appealed to a reader's humanity by discussing the humanity of slaves. One article in particular was full of praise regarding the intelligence of Negroes, claiming that "it appears there is not a single department of taste of science in which some negro has not distinguished himself".[48] Other articles gave the bare facts about crimes committed by slaves which were often murders against white escorts or uprisings.[49]

In 1828, an event occurred in Belfast which gave vent to the town's anti-slavery sentiment. A cargo of sugar arrived into Belfast port, and with the cargo there were twelve slaves. A few days after its arrival a "man of colour who resides in this town" appealed to local citizens for help to free the twelve slaves.[50] Eleven of the men were brought before the town's magistrates and offered freedom, with the magistrates seeking the men's decisions on whether to stay or return to slavery.[51] Three men made the decision to be free, and the remaining men decided to return to slavery, so they could re-join their families. The paper

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[46] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, May 7, 1825; July 11, 1825; October 31, 1825; December 26, 1825; March 8, 1826.
[47] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, April 17, 1826.
[48] *Belfast News-Letter*, December 16, 1828.
[49] Ibid., October 16, 1829.
[50] Ibid., September 5, 1828.
[51] The twelfth man did not show to the meeting.

makes the point that no criticism was given on this occasion to the men's employers, but that those who organised the meeting simply wished the slaves to have the option of freedom. The article however did point out a slave's capability to love, writing that the men's choices to return to loved ones had given the organisers of the meeting "… pleasure to observe the reasons which they had assigned for wishing to return to their own country, evincing that they felt those kinds of endearments for their families and friends which had sometimes been supposed that persons in their condition did not possess."[52] The organisers also pledged their support for the men who wished to be free, in helping them find employment.

While in the eighteenth century anti-slavery sentiment had largely been connected to liberal views, in the nineteenth century the topic drew support from both liberal and conservative citizens. In July 1828, the Presbyterian Synod met in Armagh and discussed slavery and the anti-slavery petitions being forwarded to the government. The Synod's support for abolition was a topic of discussion.[53] In previous years, anti-slavery support in Belfast had been fractured with no organised societies aiming for the abolition of the slave trade or slave emancipation. However, this changed in 1830, as in September of that year the Belfast Anti-Slavery Society (hereafter, BASS) was formed. Its establishment was due to a request by one hundred and fifty inhabitants for Sir Stephen May, the Sovereign of Belfast, to call a meeting with the purpose of promoting the abolition of slavery within the British Empire.[54] The society had the support of citizens from numerous denominations which demonstrated the growth in the town's abolitionist sentiment.[55]

In November 1830 – two months after the founding of BASS – a meeting took place in the town which attracted the attendance of over two thousand of the town's "wealthy and influential" inhabitants. During the meeting the attendees passed resolutions demanding reform and criticising the Donegall influence and interests. There was also some rejoicing in

[52] *Belfast News-Letter*, September 5, 1828.
[53] Ibid., July 15, 1828.
[54] *Guardian and Constitutional Advocate*, September 17, 1830.
[55] Ibid., September 17, 1830.

the non-denominational character of the meeting's membership.[56] This meeting would be the formation of the town's Whig party (also known as Liberals and Reformists). Those attending the meeting included men who would become prominent in the town's politics, such as Robert James Tennent and James Emerson.[57] The formation of the BASS and the numbers of citizens attending the reform meeting, demonstrates that to some degree, the liberal leanings of the eighteenth century had survived within the town, despite the growing religious tensions and the criticism towards Catholic emancipation.

The BASS proved to be an active society with a passionate membership. It had regular communication with other British societies, further demonstrating the strengthening bonds between Britain and Belfast in the period. Shared reports included interviews with the BASS's delegation and MPs for Belfast, including the Presbyterian Robert James Tennent, a member of the prominent Tennent family and brother in law to MP James Emerson Tennent. So dedicated were the members of the society that when Robert James Tennent was running for MP in the Belfast districts, he was told by the Presbyterian Reverend John Edgar, that only those who supported abolition would get the members' votes:

> I am directed by the committee of the Belfast auxiliary antislavery society to faithfully and pointedly to request from you an explicit declaration, whether, should you be returned as a member of parliament, you will use every constitutional means for effecting, throughout the British dominions, the immediate extinction of Negro Slavery.[58]

Edgar demanded on behalf of the society's members to ascertain whether Tennent would pledge an election issue that he would demand abolition throughout the British colonies, if

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[56] Ian Budge and Cornelius O'Leary, *Belfast: Approach to Crisis, A Study of Belfast Politics*, (London: Macmillan, 1973), 41.
[57] James Emerson would later take the name James Emerson Tennent when he married into the Tennent family.
[58] *Correspondence of [Rev. Dr] John Edgar,* October 19, 1832, Tennent Papers, D1748/G/180/1A, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.

elected. It was abundantly clear that if Tennent agreed then he would find supporters amongst the society. Tennant in his reply to Edgar condemned slavery:

> …slavery, however mitigated or modified, shall ever meet with my decided and incompromising [sic] hostility; that I consider it, in the words of the Declaration to which they acceded as "equally abhorrent…and distant from principle and human feeling."[59]

The 1832 election, for which Tennent was campaigning, was significant in the town's history as it was the first election after the Great Reform Act.[60] Two main parties emerged in Ireland, but not uniformly. The Whigs were more extensive within the southern provinces and campaigned for Catholic emancipation and political reform, yet the Reformers did have some support in Ulster. Unlike the Reformers, the town's Conservatives (or Tories) relied upon patronage and influence. However, as Ian Budge and Cornelius O'Leary have argued it would be incorrect to label all non-Liberals in the town Conservative supporters as many held eclectic beliefs.[61] These even included Lord Donegall, who had voted against Catholic emancipation but voted in favour of parliamentary reform. However, despite the eclectic support seen amongst Belfast's politicians there is no doubt that the town's politics was beginning to develop a more conservative streak.

The growing tensions between the Conservative supporters and the Liberals were highlighted during the 1832 campaign. While formally a member of the Whig party (Liberal), Emerson Tennent split from the party to align with Lord Arthur Chichester (the son of the second Marquis), under the aegis of his political mentor, Lord Stanley.[62]

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[59] *Robert Tennent to John Edgar,* October 22, 1832, Tennent Papers, D1748/G/180/1B, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[60] For more information regarding the 1832 Reform Act please see, in chronological order: Eric J. Evans, *The Great Reform Act of 1832*, (London: Routledge, 1994); Edward Pearce, *Reform!: The Fight for the 1832 Reform Act*, (London: Random House, 2010); Antonia Frasier, *The Drama of the Great Reform Bill 1832*, (London: Hatchette, 2013).
[61] Budge and O'Leary, *Approach to Crisis*, 41.
[62]*Emerson Tennent Papers*, 1773-1916, D2922, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Chichester, was not supported by the town's reformers as they believed he simply wished to continue the Donegall interest. By Tennent aligning with Chichester, he was now in direct competition with his family member Robert James Tennent who was nominated by the reform party alongside the radical, William Sharman Crawford.[63] The drama of the election was reflected within the town's press, with the *News-Letter* supportive of the Chichester/ Emerson Tennent nomination and the more recently established liberal *Northern Whig* supportive of the Tennent/Crawford nomination.

The tensions surrounding the 1832 election demonstrated the changes in Belfast's political sphere. However, the election was also significant because it highlighted the importance of the abolition of slavery to the town's citizens. In December 1832, an article published within the *Whig* exposed the acrimony surrounding the election, but also the candidates' views on slavery. Both Sharman Crawford and Lord Arthur Chichester spoke on topics important to local citizens and the abolition of slavery was a prominent topic. Crawford declared his support for the anti-slavery cause:

> …the practice of one human being claiming a property in the body of another human being, is contrary to both divine and human law…the immediate abolition of such a system is essential to the exercise of any effectual means for the improvement of the condition of our enslaved fellow-creatures.[64]

Chichester meanwhile argued that "every constitutional means should be adopted for its immediate extinction throughout the British dominions."[65] Clearly, the topic of slavery remained a high-profile issue, yet it also demonstrates where changing political views had impacted anti-slavery support. While Crawford was in favour of immediate abolition, as was

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[63] Budge and O'Leary, *Approach to Crisis*, 41-43. Tennent was head of the Belfast reform society and was one of the most influential liberal figures in the period. For more on Tennent and his role in Belfast in the 1800s see: Bew, *Glory of Being Britons*.
[64] *Northern Whig*, December 20, 1832.
[65] Ibid., December 20, 1832.

Robert James Tennent, Chichester was more muted in his reply and stated that he would leave it "to the wisdom of Parliament the devising of the most suitable plan for carrying into effect that compensation which may be required by existing interests…"[66] He was of course speaking about the compensation that some in Britain thought necessary for the planters and slave owners in the British colonies, who would lose vast sums of money if abolition was successful.[67]

Chichester was not alone in his opinions regarding compensation, as the topic was a divisive issue in the period. Emerson Tennent also displayed similar thoughts to Chichester, as while he campaigned for abolition he believed colonists should be reimbursed for lost profits if abolition were successful. His views however, attracted local criticism and he received letters criticising his belief that colonists should not be punished. In his reply, he explained his reasoning:

> You forget…that if there is to be any '*hanging*' in the case, the British Parliament, who at one time *compelled* the colonists to keep slaves, are the men who ought to be '*hanged up by the neck,*' and not the planters, who, under their guarantee, expended large sums in the purchase and improvement of colonial estates…I would wish to combine 'humanity to the negroes' with 'charity' to the planters.[68]

Emerson Tennent's views were part of a wider national issue facing the arguments for abolition. Many were in favour, however a selection believed it would be wrong to punish planters for their role in slavery. Emerson Tennent himself believed slavery repugnant, calling it, "…in its essence, abhorrent from reason and humanity; and, in its effects,

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[66] *Northern Whig*, December 20, 1832.
[67] For more information regarding compensation during the campaign of the abolition of slavery see: Nicholas Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-Ownership, Compensation and British Society at the End of Slavery*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Frédérique Beauvois, *Between Blood and Gold: The Debates over Compensation for Slavery in the Americas*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016).
[68] *James E. Tennent to C. Stuart. Printed letter,* 1832, D923/4, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.

subversive of morality, and incompatible with the designs of an all wise and benevolent providence…"[69] Despite the disagreement regarding compensation for planters, it is apparent that the majority in Belfast supported the overall abolition of slavery.

Despite many being in favour of abolition, the views and politics of local citizens surrounding abolition were fractured. Particularly when compared to the abolitionist support seen in the eighteenth century which attracted similar like-minded individuals. Yet, despite the growing divide between the town's reformers and conservatives, many tended to agree that slavery was an abhorrent crime that needed to be abolished. It was simply the means that brought forth arguments. As demonstrated by the prominent role abolition played in the 1832 election, abolition was a popular topic in the town in the 1830s. In 1833, members from the BASS, including Robert James Tennent, formed part of a delegation which was sent to London to demand abolition in the lead up to the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act.[70] That same year the *News-Letter* published an article regarding African slavery and the theme of liberty arguing that "Every man who is born has an absolute right, beyond all possible laws and customs, to personal liberty, nor can he ever rightfully be deprived of it…"[71] The *Whig* also continued with its abolitionist views, publishing an article which criticised slavery in the United States, noting that "The great blot upon the character of the United States of America, is the existence of slavery in that country which is emphatically *free*".[72]

Following the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act, Richard Huzzey has observed that nationally some believed that by the passing of the Abolition Act they were no longer responsible for other countries' involvement in slavery.[73] This was no doubt true also of some Belfast citizens, and it is very likely that some support did dissipate after 1833. It is clear however that anti-slavery support within Belfast still endured. In the years following

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[69] *James E. Tennent to C. Stuart. Printed letter*, 1832, D923/4, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[70] *To the Friends of the Anti-Slavery Cause in Ireland*, 1833. James Tennent Papers, D1748/G/282/1, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[71] *Belfast News-Letter*, April 12, 1833.
[72] *Northern Whig*, February 4, 1833.
[73] Richard Huzzey, 'The Moral Geography of British Anti-Slavery Responsibilities', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society: Sixth Series Vol XXII*, ed. Ian, W. Archer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 112.

the 1833 Act**,** Robert Tennent shared regular correspondence with Belfast citizen William Webb, and they often discussed the issue of slavery and their mutual abhorrence of the apprenticeship system.[74] Criticism of slavery also still played a prominent role in the town's press, particularly in relation to the United States. The town's anti-slavery society held regular meetings and issued circulars which were published in the local press. In February 1835 the *News-Letter* published a circular which detailed how over two million men, women and children were held in involuntary and degrading bondage.[75] The circular went on to give information regarding the mistreatment of slaves, with one harrowing incident given in detail. However, the circular not only discussed the physical abuse of the slaves, but also the laws passed to prevent the "intellectual culture and moral improvement of the negro race."[76] Articles such as these were common, demonstrating that the passage of the 1833 Act was not enough to alleviate the anti-slavery sentiments among the town's citizens.[77]

In the early years of the nineteenth century abolitionist support was fractured, much like in the eighteenth century. Yet, following the formation of the BASS in 1830 anti-slavery supporters began to formally unite. That the society, and abolition itself, held the support of both reformers and conservatives demonstrates how important a role abolition had in the town.

Growing support among Belfast's religious denominations

In the eighteenth century, anti-slavery support in Belfast had largely been contained to liberal Presbyterians within the town. This was for several reasons; primarily however it was the result of Belfast's population being predominantly Presbyterian. The popular ideology of the day was also a contributing factor as enlightenment thinking, which encouraged the

[74] Robert Tennent Correspondence, 1790-1819, Tennent Papers, D1748/G/716/3, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[75] *Belfast News-Letter,* February 20, 1835.
[76] Ibid., February 20, 1835.
[77] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, April 20, 1835; May 20, 1835; November 18, 1835; *Northern Whig*, August 11, 1836; *Belfast New-Letter,* January 5, 1836; March 11, 1836.

concept of liberty, was supported by the Presbyterian Church. Subsequently, support for abolition was a lauded cause, particularly among the town's New-Light congregation.

In the nineteenth century however, Presbyterian domination of the town's anti-slavery sentiment would be affected with abolitionist support increasing among other local religious denominations. While this development in support would be most apparent from the late 1830s onwards, it was first discernible over twenty years earlier. The increased activity among minority denominations was largely related to the town's increased industrialisation following the Act of Union, which provided greater prosperity for its citizens. A significant result of this growth in prosperity would be mass migration from the rural areas of Ulster into the town. The high volume of migration was for employment purposes, more commonly within one of the town's numerous textile mills.[78] This immigration was also influenced by the decreasing opportunities within the Irish hinterlands as nineteenth century industrialisation took hold.[79] The rise in the town's population in the nineteenth century was significant: In 1801 the population of the town was 19,000 yet by 1891 the city, incorporated in 1888, had a population of approximately 255,950.[80] The population increase is vital as to the development in the town's anti-slavery sentiment.

Early Quaker influence

During the eighteenth century several religious denominations were involved in the national anti-slavery campaign. One denomination that was highly active in the campaign was the Religious Society of Friends (also Quakers or Friends), with many Quakers having prominent roles in both the British and American campaigns.[81] Yet in the eighteenth century, when so many of their British brethren were involved in the national campaign, there was

[78] Jordan, *Who Cared?*, 1-24.
[79] Crawford, *The Impact of the Domestic Linen Industry*, 158; Timothy J. Meagher, *The Columbia Guide to Irish American History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 100.
[80] Budge and O'Leary, *Approach to Crisis*, 28; *Belfast News-Letter*, August 20, 1813.
[81] Brycchan Carey and Geoffrey Plank, eds. *Quakers and Abolition*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014); Maurice Jackson and Susan Kozel, eds. *Quakers and Their Allies in the Abolitionist Cause, 1754-1808*, (New York: Routledge, 2016); Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*.

little involvement of Belfast's Quakers in the campaign, nor even publicly discussing their anti-slavery support. This lack of involvement is curious as during the eighteenth century there existed several Quaker meeting houses in Ulster. One of the largest and most documented being the Lisburn Meeting house which attracted Belfast's Quakers, due to the lack of a meeting house within the town. This changed however in November 1799, when the Quarterly Meeting approved a proposal to hold a Meeting in Belfast.[82]

It is evident that the Religious Society of Friends were not one of the major denominations within Belfast during the time period under examination, with only forty members in the Belfast Meeting House by 1815. Yet, Belfast Quaker congregation numbers do not accurately reflect the importance Quakers had in philanthropic and social issues within Belfast in the nineteenth century.

It has been well documented that the Religious Society of Friends played a substantial role in American abolitionism.[83] It is therefore only to be expected that the worldwide Quaker networks would have influenced Belfast Quakers at home. Nineteenth century Quaker networks would have an important impact on Belfast's abolitionist sentiment for several reasons. One reason was due to Quakers being highly influential amongst one another due to their interest in travel and discussion. Members of the Religious Society of Friends have long used travel to communicate and extend their network. This was seen with Meeting Houses regularly sending individual members to visit Meeting houses abroad and in doing so, they were able to build ties and friendships.

Yet, Belfast's eighteenth-century Quaker population were unlike their British counterparts in that they were generally very inward looking. For instance, the failed

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[82] The first Meetings were held in the attic of Belfast Quaker Samuel Alexander in North Street. Following an increase in numbers the Religious Society of Friends soon leased a plot in Brewery Lane in 1809. The land was once again leased from Samuel Alexander, who himself leased it from the Marquis of Donegall. By 1815 the Meeting house membership had reached forty and included husband and wife William and Hannah Bell. For more information see: Sandra King, *History of the Religious Society of Friends Frederick Street, Belfast*, (Belfast: Sandra King, 1999).

[83] See, in chronological study: Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Ryan P. Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse: The Quakers and the Abolitionist Dilemma, 1820-1865*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Carey and Plank, eds. *Quakers and Abolition*; Jackson and Kozel, eds. *Quakers and Their Allies in the Abolitionist Cause*.

rebellion of 1798, which attracted mass attention throughout Ireland, and particularly Belfast, went unmentioned in the Meeting House's minutes, bar one mention of a Friend who lost property.[84] Their hesitancy in partaking in outside events has been noted by historians, with Neville Newhouse observing that while the society was active in regard to religious devotions, it advised its members from going "beyond their business activities into political, or even into public affairs."[85] Yet, this lack of involvement in social issues, including abolition, would see a transformation following a visit to Ulster in the early 1800s by the abolitionist Stephen Grellet.[86]

Following Grellet's visit to Ulster there are signs that both his visit and the topic of abolitionism made an impact on those in Belfast. Increased political activity was seen, with petitions sent by local Quakers to the British Parliament demanding the end of slavery within the British colonies.[87] Articles relating to Irish Quaker abolitionists were also published within the *News-Letter*.[88] Furthermore, the British abolitionist publication the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* was sent by request, to local Quakers.[89] The publication was sent by Quaker families in England to update local Quakers on abolitionist news, prior to the establishment of the Belfast Anti-Slavery Society in 1830. The interest in the *Reporter* not only demonstrates the interest the local Quaker community had in abolition by the 1820s, but also demonstrates the key communications between Quaker abolitionists in England and Belfast during the period. It is evident that by the 1820's Belfast Quakers held a vigorous interest in abolition.

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[84] Minute Book, Lisburn Monthly Meeting, 1770-1813, (Men's and Women's), Strong Room, Lisburn Quaker Meeting House, Lisburn, Northern Ireland.
[85] Newhouse, 'John Hancock Jnr', 47.
[86] Grellet, originally from France, had emigrated to America during the French Revolution. Following his arrival, he soon converted to Quakerism, and became interested in abolition. For more information regarding Stephen Grellet see: William Wistar Comfort, *Stephen Grellet, 1773-1855*, (New York: Macmillan, 1942); Minute Book, Lisburn Monthly Meeting, 1770-1813, (Men's and Women's), Strong Room, Lisburn Quaker Meeting House, Lisburn, Northern Ireland.
[87] Petition urging the Abolition of Negro Slavery, C. 1824, Goff Family Correspondence, D1762/50, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[88] *Belfast News-Letter*, March 25, 1828; June 13, 1828.
[89] *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 1826, Pike Papers, D3491/A/4, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.

That Belfast Quakers would be so influenced by Grellet's earlier visit is surprising, due to the generally sequestered nature of local Quakers in the period. Yet, there existed Quakers who were exceptions to this inward facing conservatism, such as John Hancock Jnr. In 1800, Hancock had imported Indian meal (a food made from maize) and American flour to help the needy during that year's famine. While this would not have been considered unusual during the great famine where Quaker involvement and aid was prevalent, it was unusual for the early 1800s, largely due to the aforementioned lack of involvement in public affairs. While Hancock later left the Society of Friends in 1801 due to issues resulting from his wish of reform within the society, his liberal acts continued as did his prevailing Quaker ethos.[90] In fact it would be the new younger generation of Friends who were more socially aware, like Hancock, who would be responsible for the denomination's involvement in local anti-slavery support. This development in Quaker involvement in social issues had first emerged in the 1810s. While Belfast in the period was beginning to see a rise in conservative ideology and growing bigotry, Hancock regularly authored articles in support of Catholic emancipation in his friend William Drennan's *Belfast Monthly Magazine* under the pseudonym 'K'.[91] Not only did Hancock write articles discussing divisive local issues, like Catholic emancipation, he also published numerous articles in relation to his abhorrence of slavery.[92] That Hancock was not the only growing liberal amongst local friends is evident, with local Quaker involvement seen with sending signed petitions sent to the British parliament demanding abolition.[93]

Despite Quaker anti-slavery activity now apparent in the early decades of the nineteenth century, it was not yet at the level it would reach in the 1830s and 40s. Yet, the involvement of those such as Hancock demonstrates that the local Meeting Houses saw a

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[90] Hancock would later open (with a partner) a school for training girls and women to operate a double-handed wheel and prepared flax for all spinners in serious economic need, guaranteeing them purchase of their work.
[91] Newhouse, 'John Hancock Jnr', 41-52.
[92] *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, December 31, 1809; March 31, 1809; November 30, 1814.
[93] *Petition urging the Abolition of Negro Slavery*, C. 1824, Goff Family Correspondence, D1762/50, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.

meaningful change in this period, in how it viewed social issues. As a result, the Religious Society of Friends, despite their small numbers, would in the next two decades be an important group in Belfast abolitionism.

Waning Presbyterian domination

During the period that saw local Friend's becoming involved in the town's existing abolitionist sentiment, Presbyterian citizens and their press continued to demonstrate anti-slavery support. This was simply due to anti-slavery activity in the period being primarily related to local Presbyterian citizens with local publications aimed towards the Presbyterian denomination. As a result, most anti-slavery activity in the town's press took place within the Presbyterian conservative and liberal newspapers such as the *News-Letter*, *Monthly Magazine* and *Whig*. Presbyterian William Drennan's publication, the *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, which published Hancock's thoughts on the topic, regularly drew attention to the plights of slaves.[94] While there was frequent criticism of slavery within the Presbyterian press, the Church also demonstrated involvement when in 1828 the Presbyterian Synod met in Armagh and declared its support for abolition. The meeting discussed slavery and the anti-slavery petitions being presently forwarded to the government.[95] Just as it had over thirty years earlier, the Synod once again declared its support for the cause.[96]

In 1830, the BASS was established, and the society's success served to demonstrate the increased involvement of other religious denominations in the town's anti-slavery sentiment. The membership of the society drew from a number of denominations including Anglican, Methodist, and New-Light Presbyterians. William Crolly, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Down and Connor was also a supporter of the society.[97] That the society had a significant level of support from multiple denominations, at the height of the town's developing evangelicalism, is not surprising. Jonathan Wright has observed that organised

[94] *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, April 30, 1813; December 31, 1809; October 31, 1811.
[95] *Belfast News-Letter*, July 15, 1828.
[96] Ibid., July 31, 1792.
[97] *Guardian and Constitutional Advocate*, September 17, 1830.

philanthropic activity predated the spread of evangelicalism within the town. He also states that evangelicals did not have the monopoly of philanthropic participation within Belfast, even after the spread of evangelicalism.[98]

Due to the lack of Catholic newspapers, it is difficult to ascertain the views of the town's Roman Catholics regarding slavery prior to the 1830s. During a visit to Belfast in 1813, the travel writer John Gamble observed that "there was scarcely a Catholic in the place", demonstrating that despite the Catholic population numbering 4,000, the denomination was very quiet within the town.[99] Within twenty years however, this number had increased to 20,000 and by 1861, 34.1% of Belfast's population was Roman Catholic.[100] As the result of such a small minority of Catholics in Belfast at the beginning of the century, there was no local newspaper aimed towards the town's Catholic population. However, this was not to last, as 1833 saw the establishment of the first Catholic newspaper in Belfast, the *Northern Herald*. The newspaper, established by the former United Irishmen C.H. Teeling, was the first publication which demonstrated local Catholic opinions ranging from politics and the economy to social welfare and poetry.

The discussion surrounding the abolition of slavery and anger at the treatment of slaves were popular topics within the *Herald*. In 1833, the paper displayed criticism in relation to the mistreatment of slaves by those in power in Jamaica.[101] One popular topic was the discussion surrounding Daniel O'Connell and his support of abolition. O'Connell was an ardent campaigner for the abolition of slavery and was a popular speaker for the cause in both Britain and America.[102] The *Herald* proved itself to be highly supportive of O'Connell's abolitionist beliefs:

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[98] Wright, *The 'Natural Leaders',* 192-3.
[99] John Gamble, *Society and Manners in Early Nineteenth-Century Ireland,* ed. by Breandán Mac Suibhne, (Dublin: Field Day, 2011), 268; Anthony C. Hepburn, *A Past Apart*, 4.
[100] W.E. Vaughan and A.J. Fitzpatrick, *Irish Historical Statistics: Population 1821-1971*, (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1978), 42.
[101] *Northern Herald*, October 5, 1833.
[102] For more information regarding Daniel O'Connell and slavery see, in chronological order: Riach, 'Daniel O'Connell and American Anti-Slavery', 3-25; Kinealy, *Daniel O'Connell and the Anti-Slavery Movement*; Daniel O'Connell, *Daniel O'Connell Upon American Slavery: With Other Irish Testimonies*, Vol 3, (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1860).

> Mr O'Connell enters into a long and powerful disquisition on the mischiefs and injustice of the government measure for Slave Emancipation. He sums up thus– "I was at my post, as your representative, during the entire of these discussions. I supported every clause that tended to abolish or even mitigate direct slavery, or indirect slavery, called apprenticeship. I supported every clause to extend the blessings of education or to promote the knowledge of Christianity. I opposed every restriction on the human mind or on the human body, and I gave my most decided opposition to the grant of twenty millions of the money of the people of these countries to persons who had, in my solemn judgment, no right or title to one single farthing."[103]

Ironically, while the Protestant press was regularly critical of O'Connell and his policies – particularly the *News-Letter* – they were sympathetic to his views of slavery and abolition.[104] Similarly, the *Herald*, spoke positively of British figures who held governmental positions, such as Wilberforce, when it came to abolition.[105] This demonstrates that during this period the town's press (both Catholic and Protestant) were at times, able to set aside political prejudice when it came to their support of abolition.[106]

During its short publication, the *Herald*'s abolitionist articles were often emotive and similar in tone to those seen within the town's protestant press:

> A Negro man died after a sinking off [sic] a convict ship [Amphitrite] off coast of Portlet. He managed to get ashore and a douanier [customs officer] stopped him with a

[103] *Northern Herald*, October 19, 1833.
[104] *Belfast News-Letter*, December 25, 1835; June 19, 1840; June 30, 1840; *Northern Whig*, June 18, 1840.
[104] *Belfast News-Letter*, October 23, 1840; *Northern Whig*, October 27, 1840.
[105] *Northern Herald*, October 19, 1833.
[106] *Northern Whig*, June 18, 1840; *Belfast News-Letter*, June 19, 1840; *Belfast News-Letter*, June 30, 1840.

> bayonet and told him not to move until an officer arrived. He asked for sustenance and shelter and was told to wait there. He soon fainted and died.[107]

The article goes on to criticise the treatment of the man, and also tells of a white female survivor who managed to get ashore from the same ship, after being rescued by two men. Once ashore with the woman, the rescuers were ordered by two officers to abandon her until the arrival of an official; she soon died at their feet. The newspaper's disgust at the treatment of the man and woman is clear throughout the article. During the paper's publication articles of a similar vein were published. Support for leading abolitionists were also popular and in 1833, the paper printed more abolitionist material with a speech by William Lloyd Garrison:

> In this boasted land of liberty and equality, the "Asylum for the oppressed of all Nations," there are now 2, 200, 000 slaves! The laws which are enacted for their subjection are even more atrocious than any to be found in the West Indian Codes. Imprisonment, fines, stripes, and even death, are threatened if they should attempt to learn the alphabet, or get instruction in a Sabbath School!…Females are often put into scales, and sold like meat by the pound, or exchanged for horse and sheep…Although the United States boast of their liberty and equality, and proclaim themselves to be an asylum for the oppressed of all nations; yet so malignant is prejudice, so strong is selfishness, and so insatiate is cruelty in the breasts of the people towards the free colored and slave population, that they who plead for their immediate emancipation from the thraldom which crushes them to earth, and for their improvement and elevation in the United State, are persecuted and calumniated, and large rewards are offered for their destruction. [108]

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[107] *Northern Herald,* November 2, 1833.
[108] Ibid., November 9, 1833.

Such articles demonstrate that the editor believed abolition would appeal to his readership. Like the *News-Letter*, liberty was a popular theme in the *Herald* and remained as popular in the nineteenth century in relation to slavery as it had been in the eighteenth. In 1834, the newspaper spoke of its "reverence for human rights" and quoted the famed English philosopher Jeremy Bentham that "Only by making the ruling Few uneasy, can the oppressed Many obtain a particle of relief".[109]

Unlike the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century saw increased activity among minority religious denominations regarding the town's anti-slavery sentiment. This was due to several factors, one being the increase in the local Catholic population which helped in the formation of a local Catholic newspaper, the *Northern Herald*. Additionally, the wider interest in social issues and demand for reform amongst the younger generations in the Religious Society of Friends meant that they took on a new active role in the town's anti-slavery support. Presbyterian support remained popular, but support was no longer limited primarily to the denomination, with vocal critique now coming from an array of citizens within the town. This development in Belfast anti-slavery sentiment was mirrored by the activity and influence of the BASS, which had a varied membership coming from multiple denominations.

A lingering Sentiment: Anti-Slavery and the 'Irish slaves'

The local anti-slavery sentiment of the early nineteenth century took place during a transformative period in Belfast's history. In the eighteenth century, Belfast's anti-slavery support had been influenced by different issues. Yet, the most prominent theme throughout was the local perception of the Irish as slaves or slave-like, with one of the most vocal groups to use slave language being Ulster's Presbyterians. The comparisons between local citizens and African slaves was due to a perceived emotional connection, as locals believed slaves were mistreated and abused just as the Irish had been under the penal laws. This slave

[109] *Northern Herald*, February 15, 1834.

identity was largely shaped by the government's treatment of Ireland's Catholics and Dissenters, with the majority of the population being the 'inferior Irish', who were not members of the established church.[110] For this reason, the discussions of chattel slavery were highly entwined with Belfast inhabitants' perceptions of their own experiences.

In the nineteenth century, local liberal ideology (mainly Presbyterian) had begun to change subtly from that seen in the eighteenth century. The previous demand for the separation of Britain and Ulster had been irreparably altered due to the events in the 1790s and the change in tactics of the British government following the failed 1798 rebellion.[111] The demand for separation was also further negated by the beneficial changes seen upon Belfast's economy following 1801. Changes in Presbyterian ideology – political and social – were not simple, with A. T Q. Stewart observing that "The change of political views [of Ulster Presbyterianism] was neither sudden nor complete".[112] Further research by scholars has since reaffirmed this statement with Jonathan Wright stating that Presbyterian "reformist sentiment existed long into the nineteenth century, albeit in changed form…"[113] This reformist sentiment – affected in many ways by the inherited memories of the penal years – would continue to impact the town's ideology and anti-slavery sentiment.

In the opening years of the nineteenth century liberty and natural rights remained popular subjects within Belfast. While many citizens had moved on from the radical liberalism of the 1790s, there still existed a form of the old ideology, which survived through the various themes connected with enlightenment thinking. Liberty – a theme of the enlightenment – was an enduring topic within the town and continued to influence many

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[110] Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, 56.
[111] For more information regarding the 1801 Act of Union see, in chronological order: Patrick M. Geoghegan, *The Irish Act of Union: A Study in High Politics, 1798-1801*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Kevin Kenny ed. *Ireland and the British Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[112] A. T. Q. Stewart, 'The transformation of Presbyterian radicalism in the North of Ireland, 1792-1825', v-vi, 54, 194-95.
[113] Wright, *The Natural Leaders*, 4. For Presbyterian reformist sentiments see, in chronological order: Peter Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism the Historical Perspective, 1610-1970*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), 137-53; I. R. McBride, *Scripture politics: Ulster Presbyterians and Irish Radicalism in the late eighteenth century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Holmes, 'Covenanter politics', 340-69; Bew, *Glory of Being Britons*; Hall, *Ulster Liberalism*.

local reformers and liberals. In 1803, the *News-Letter* demonstrated the survival of the old ideology when it published a poem titled "An ode to Irishmen":

> And as the celestial guest
> Beam'd before her view confessed
> Catch a portion of that fire.
> Which, from his immoral lyre,
> Rous'd to deeds of glorious merit
> Ancient Greece's godlike spirit.
> Then with patriot ardour burning,
> Slaves abhorring, tyrants burning.
> IRELAND! to thy youths around,
> From her harp, indignant swelling,
> Ev'ry gentler note repelling,
> Should the call, "to arms! to arms!" refound
>
> Heirs of Liberty! your foe
> Aims at *you* his deadliest blow.
> From yon polluted shore he sends
> Anarchy's detested fiends,
> Repine, murder, treachery, lust
> All that can excite disgust-
> All that can subvert, destroy
> Social order, social joy- [114]

The poem demonstrates that the familiar concept of an armed uprising to gain or maintain liberty remained prominent in the period. This is not surprising, as the inherited memories of the penal years were carried into the nineteenth century by the reformers who managed to survive the repression of the late 1790s. A number of these reformers held prominent

[114] *Belfast News-Letter*, November 15, 1803.

positions within the town. This included the anti-slavery supporter William Drennan, a long-term proponent of liberty and natural rights.[115] In his publication, the *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, Drennan regularly published articles which discussed liberty and espousing the belief that all of mankind was deserving of it.[116] Drennan's publication was not alone, as the *News-Letter* also published material regarding the concept of liberty. While there were growing conservative elements in the town, support for the abolition of slavery remained consistent with criticism directed at those considered guilty. In 1802, the *News-Letter* published an article reproaching previous governments, particularly their lack of action in tackling the slave trade.[117] In 1806, the newspaper demonstrated a measure of the eighteenth century ideology when it argued that slave owners in America were forming an army that hated them and who would eventually revolt against them.[118] This argument is similar to that seen in the eighteenth century, when locals discussed the mistreatment and 'enslavement' of the Irish majority by the Ascendancy and British government. Such discussions helped to spur some Belfast locals into taking part in the 1798 rebellion.

Liberalism survived in Belfast after 1801. Despite an increase in support for the Union, some of the town's citizens who had been involved in the earlier calls for reform remained loyal to their original ideology. Liberalism continued to be seen in the causes they supported such as abolition, or Catholic emancipation – which some in the town supported. Support for liberal causes was seen not only through the local press, but also local churches. This included the Synod of Ulster which maintained its liberal ideology when it declared its support for "the abolition of political distinctions on account of religious profession".[119] Citizens in the town also took action to allow more equality when in 1814, Belfast saw the

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[115] In 1784 Drennan authored the *Letters of Orellana, an Irish Helot*, in which he called the Irish slaves. See: William Drennan, *Letters of Orellana, an Irish Helot, to the Seven Northern Counties (…)* (Dublin: J. Chambers and T. Heery, 1785).
[116] *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, December 1, 1808; August 31, 1811; April 30, 1811; October 31, 1813; 333; October 1, 1808; September 30, 1814.
[117] *Belfast News-Letter*, July 9, 1802.
[118] Ibid., July 11, 1806.
[119] John McCann, 'The Northern Irish Liberal Presbyterians 1770-1830', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 21, No. 1 (July 1995): 96-114 (p. 104).

formation of the Belfast Academical Institution. A significant number of its founders were enlightened liberals, with many having connections to the United Irishmen.[120] As a result, the ideology seen in the initial years of the Society of the United Irishmen was reflected within the new Institution. It would be a place for Presbyterian students who would otherwise need to attend Scottish schools, however it was also agreed among the founders that the school would be non-sectarian with no religious tests, allowing assorted denominations to enter.[121]

With strong connections to the politics and ideology of the 1790s it is no surprise that the memories of the penal laws continued to affect local citizens and the town's press. Particularly as not all the penal laws were repealed in respect to the Catholic situation. In 1810, the *Commercial Chronicle* demonstrated its lingering animosity towards the penal code period:

> From 1793 to 1800 (the period when our resident Legislature committed their political suicide) the Catholics of Ireland continued unsuccessfully to petition. The malignant star that presided over the destinies of Ireland, still continued to shed its baleful influence…[122]

The *News-Letter* similarly displayed residual anger over the penal laws when in 1810 it published an article arguing that the penal laws had reduced Ireland to a "ruinous condition".[123] With lingering resentment towards the treatment of the 'inferior Irish' in the previous century, it is not surprising that abolition remained a topic regularly discussed, as for many, they were often entwined. Support for those enslaved was common within the

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[120] The United Irish connection was significant with citizens like William Tennent, Dr Robert Tennent and W. B. Nielson, the son of Samuel Nielson the editor of the *Northern Star*, being directors of the school.
[121] Unlike Trinity College, Dublin. See: McCann, 'The Northern Irish Liberal Presbyterians 1770-1830', 107.
[122] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, January 22, 1810.
[123] *Belfast News-Letter*, May 25, 1810.

press and local literature had long promoted armed uprisings to protect Irish liberty. The poetry published in this period encouraged slaves to do likewise. Such encouragement was seen in 1805, when the *Chronicle* published a particularly emotive poem detailing the horrors and abuse of slavery. The author went on to incite slaves to take up arms against their abusers and recover their liberty.[124]

Previously, Presbyterians had been the denomination that would regularly use slave language when describing their situation in Ireland. However, in the nineteenth century, it also became common for local Catholics to use slave language, due to the situation they found themselves in with the British government not following through with Catholic emancipation.[125] In 1811, slave language was used to describe the Catholic situation during a Roman Catholic meeting:

> …slaves of the most abject kind, who are denied constitutional privileges account of their religious principles…the enslavement of the Catholics in Ireland was no inconsiderable task, and their manumission might well expect to meet with a formidable opposition, from the same antichristian spirit that rivetted their chains.[126]

While slave language was now common among the town's growing Roman Catholic population, by the 1820s it was no longer as prevalent within Presbyterian discussion of the penal laws. Instead slave language became commonly linked to another campaign which was beginning to dominate local headlines – tenant rights. Tenant rights in the nineteenth century was an agrarian and economic issue which had carried over from the previous century. Nineteenth century campaigns were a fervent attempt to gain more rights for tenants with many citizens believing tenant farmers were abused for the sake of profits. It would become a prominent issue for which many demanded resolution. Due to the oppression

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[124] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, September 18, 1805.
[125] *Belfast News-Letter*, June 7, 1811; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, June 8, 1811; October 16, 1811; April 6, 1812.
[126] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, October 16, 1811.

experienced by many tenants, many who campaigned on behalf of the tenants once again saw similarities to their situation and that of the African slaves.[127] In many ways the tenant rights campaign was similar to the campaigns against the penal laws in the eighteenth century, with the Ascendancy once again fulfilling the role of the callous elite who mistreated those below them.[128] After 1801, Ulster's Presbyterians had thought it better to "bear the oppression of landlords than to be piked by papists", due to the benefits it brought them.[129] Yet, they remained angry at having to bear any repression whatsoever.

The abuse of tenants would be a popular topic in Belfast. David George Boyce has discussed the Presbyterian perspective regarding the oppression of landlords, observing that the abuse of tenants would once again arouse "a spirit of radicalism in Presbyterian breasts".[130] However, he noted that this new radical spirit differed to that seen previously within the United Irishmen. Instead this new spirit "was related to specific grievances rather than to the grievances of all Irish underdogs".[131] This new energy among the town's Presbyterians while different to that seen in the 1790s – which gave a large measure of support to all of those oppressed under the penal laws – did not affect support of abolition. It can be hypothesized that this continuing support was due to slaves not being viewed as a threat to the Protestant position in Ireland. From the 1820s, Catholics were increasingly considered a threat due to the denomination's growing numbers in the town, and the threat of the nationwide campaign for Catholic emancipation. However, support for abolition was different as it affected those who offered no threat to the Protestant situation at home. It also maintained the existing Presbyterian ideology in liberty and natural rights. While clear that

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[127] *Northern Whig*, April 8, 1833; December 26, 1833; May 31, 1832; January 26, 1835; *Belfast News-Letter*, January 22, 1836; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, June 10, 1829; July 13, 1833.
[128] See, in chronological order: James S. Donnelly, *Landlord and tenant in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973); William Edward Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants in Mid-Victorian Ireland*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Timothy W. Guinnane and Ronald I. Miller, 'Bonds without Bondsmen: Tenant-Right in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', *The Journal of Economic History*, 56, No. 1 (Mar., 1996): 113-142; D. George Boyce, *Nineteenth Century Ireland (New Gill History of Ireland 4): The Search for Stability*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2005), 105-135.
[129] W. T. Latimer, *A History of the Irish Presbyterians*, Second edition, (Belfast: J. Cleeland, 1902), 41.
[130] Boyce, *The Search for Stability*, 29.
[131] Ibid., 29.

the Catholic demand for emancipation was due to their own demands for 'Liberty', more conservative local Protestants disagreed. They argued that the Catholic situation was nothing like slavery and the call for their "emancipation" was ridiculed.[132] In effect, the newspaper denied that Catholics were slaves. This is despite local Presbyterian reformers claiming similarly in the eighteenth century when discussing their own situation.[133]

During the 1830s, support in Belfast for abolition and 'Liberty' remained prominent. In 1833, the *News-Letter* published an article discussing man's rights, arguing that "Every man who is born has an absolute right, beyond all possible laws and customs, to personal liberty, nor can he ever rightfully be deprived of it…"[134] Similarly, supporters of tenant rights used slave language to detail the abuses of tenants in Ireland: "He [an Irish tenant] has no power to make a beneficial contract; he has no choice; he must accept his landlord's terms, however exorbitant; or starve".[135] This unsophisticated borrowing of slave language shows how some Belfast citizens viewed their own conditions. While using slave terminology regarding their own situation, local support for abolition remained consistent demonstrating that for some a link still existed between themselves and the slaves. During this period, compensation for slave owners was a prominent topic in the press, with staunch abolitionists believing it wrong for planters to be compensated for liberating people who should never have been enslaved. The liberal *Whig* made its feeling surrounding compensation very clear:

> As a principle of *right*, we deny that the slave owners have any more claim to compensation for the emancipation of their slaves than had the owners of rotten

[132] *Belfast News-Letter*, January 8, 1828.
[133] The Presbyterian Reverend Samuel Barber wrote "…Evidence that we are an enslaved People as every Nation must be where the law is not the will of that community. Look forward to better days...". Revd Samuel Barber Collection, PA36, PHSI, Belfast, Northern Ireland. There are many comments discussing the enslavement of the majority of the country in the period. In addition, there are numerous contemporary sources that mention the Irish and slavery in relation to the penal code. For more information see: Edmund Burke Papers, 2A 3463, and Special List No. 430, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Republic of Ireland; William Steel Dickson, *Sermons of William Steel Dickson*, (Belfast: Joseph Smyth, 1817).
[134] *Belfast News-Letter*, April 12, 1833.
[135] *Northern Whig*, December 26, 1833.

> boroughs to compensation for their disenfranchisement, – or the Protestants of Ireland to compensation for the equal admission of Catholics to civil privileges…[136]

This source also further demonstrates the level of affinity that local citizens had with those held in bondage, as both planters and landlords are mentioned.

Support for tenant rights continued, yet the former cordial relationship between the town's Presbyterians and Catholics continued to be fraught. While some of the town's reformers and its press spoke in favour of Catholic emancipation – such as the *Whig* – conservatives were influenced by the growing sectarianism in the town (which gained in strength from the 1820s) alongside the prospect of Catholic emancipation. Much of the animosity between Catholics and Protestants had in fact very little to do with the town's long-term residents. Instead it was largely related to the emigration from Ulster's hinterlands and rural emigrants bringing with them their sectarian fears and hatreds.[137] This was reflected in the growth of Orange and Ribbon societies within the town from the 1820s.

In the early nineteenth century, the concept of liberty was entwined with local ideology. However, while in the early years the ideology often demonstrated support for slaves and other Irish denominations, fracturing relationships among the towns denominations – due to migration and increased conservatism – led to liberty being a topic not supported by some locals when used to argue for Catholic emancipation. As a result, the 'Irish slave' mentalité changed somewhat from that seen in the 1700s with growing sectarianism and fear affecting support for all of Ireland's 'underdogs'. Yet despite these changes the mentalité retained many similarities, and these were seen in the support for abolition and tenant rights. By the mid-1830s, Belfast's earlier belief in abolition still held firm, due to their own religious beliefs regarding the Bible and biblical slavery.

The growing links between the national campaign and Belfast's anti-slavery sentiment

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[136] *Northern Whig*, April 8, 1833.
[137] Hirst, *Religion, Politics and Violence*, 19.

In the eighteenth-century Belfast closely followed the activities of the national anti-slavery campaign in its press with praise often given to those who campaigned for the abolition of slavery. This praise, however, was often blended with criticism due to local factors – namely anger at the penal laws – playing themselves out while still giving recognition to the national campaigns. However, the nineteenth saw profound changes in the relationship between Britain and Belfast due to a growing bond and the formation of a British identity in the town.[138] Whereas in the eighteenth century anti-slavery supporters may have discussed the national campaign, there was not much involvement nor interaction between the two. In the nineteenth century however, closer ties helped to develop communication and correspondence between anti-slavery supporters in Belfast and in Britain.

The opening years of the nineteenth century saw vocal abolitionist support, much like that seen during the 1790s.[139] The town's press gave frequent coverage to the ongoing attempts by William Wilberforce to pass a Bill banning the slave trade and they were vocal in their support, with a number of abolitionist articles.[140] In 1806, the *Chronicle* published an article detailing the belief that slavery was not given much support, "…in this country [Ireland], the supporters of the Slave Trade are very rare, and even in England the defence of its toleration is, we believe, chiefly confined to those whose interest is concerned."[141] In the lead up to the passing of the 1807 Slave Trade Act, the Bill frequently dominated local newspapers.[142] However, support for the national campaign was not limited to the press, as communication between local anti-slavery supporters and those in Britain soon became more common. Several years prior to Wilberforce's success in banning the slave trade, he

[138] Bew, *Glory of Being Britons*, 52-92.
[139] *Belfast News-Letter*, February 9, 1802.
[140] Ibid., May 1, 1804; June 5, 1804; February 22, 1805; February 17, 1807; January 27, 1807; February 13, 1807; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, November 24, 1806.
[141] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, July 16, 1806.
[142] Ibid., April 26, 1806; June 18, 1806; *Belfast News-Letter*, June 17, 1806; March 24, 1807.

exchanged correspondence with the Marquess of Abercorn who supported Wilberforce's aims, with the Marquess drafting a speech in support of the abolition of slavery.[143]

In the years following the Act, British politics was greatly influenced by British citizens' public outcries against slavery. Belfast and its press participated in this vocal condemnation, with frequent emotive articles denouncing the treatment of slaves.[144] In 1816, for example, the *Chronicle* reported an eyewitness account of slavery in Algiers: "I saw some men who looked almost sixty, and some children who could not be more than eight years old; the whole of them had their legs swelled and cut in such a horrid manner, that we all thought they could not recover".[145] For many citizens the slave trade act did not go far enough.

During the 1810s British support of abolition reached a level of "fanaticism", and this was displayed in the local press during the Congress of Vienna and the role of abolition during the conference.[146] The conference – held as a means to promote long term peace within Europe – was greatly affected by British citizens' demands for abolition. Since 1805 the Royal Navy had been largely able to blockade French trade during the Napoleonic Wars, which subsequently affected French involvement in the slave trade. Yet, when the war ended, many British abolitionists were aware that the French could re-engage in the trade and as a result mass petitions were initiated. The mass scale of the public interest and petitioning led to the slave trade being placed on the conference agenda, with abolitionists hoping that the slave trade would be banned by the countries attending. However, while some progress was made, with Portugal, for example, being paid compensation and

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[143] *Marquess of Abercorn to William Wilberforce*, 1804, Abercorn Papers, D623/A/82/33, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland; *Draft for a speech on the abolition of the slave trade*, 1806, Abercorn Papers, D623/A/233/76A, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[144] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle,* June 28, 1806; *Belfast News-Letter*, February 6, 1807; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, July 17, 1816.
[145] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, September 21, 1816.
[146] Jerome Reich, 'The Slave Trade at the conference of Vienna: A Study in English Public Opinion', *Journal of Negro History*, 53, No. 2, (April, 1968): 129-43.

eventually agreeing to a joint condemnation of the trade, for many this did not go nearly far enough.[147]

Lord Castlereagh's (the British Foreign Secretary) attempts to broker a deal regarding slavery during the conference were derided in the Belfast press.[148] However, on this occasion it was local women who were the force pushing for abolition. The article, in the *Monthly Magazine*, was addressed to the women of Ireland and detailed how women could play a vital role in abolition, due to the influence they had over the men in their lives. The article demonstrates the discussions and thoughts of local women regarding slavery, and the presumed failure of Lord Castlereagh in guaranteeing the end of slave trade amongst the countries involved in the peace talks:

> Lord Castlereagh declares that he found it impossible to obtain peace without immolating these unoffending victims. Let us then enable him to say to France, "The British nation will not consent to this sacrifice. The people will not purchase with the blood of Africa that peace which they have earned with their own; with some of the purest, and some of the noblest blood that flowed in British veins." Where the voice of the nation is unanimous, it must prevail.[149]

During the 1820s, Belfast's interest in the national campaign continued with petitions sent to the British parliament by local citizens.[150] The growing networks between

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[147] For more information regarding the Congress of Vienna and slavery see, in chronological order: Betty Fladeland, "Abolitionist Pressures on the Concert of Europe, 1814-1822", *The Journal of Modern History*, 38, No. 4 (Dec., 1966): 355-373; Reich, 'The Slave Trade at the conference of Vienna…'; Mark Jarrett, *The Congress of Vienna and its Legacy: War and Great Power Diplomacy After Napoleon*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014); Tim Chapman, *The Congress of Vienna*, (London: Routledge, 2006).

[148] *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, July 31, 1814. Lord Castlereagh was a local Irish peer, the British Foreign Secretary during the Congress of Vienna and the former Chief Secretary of Ireland. His family seat was Mount Stewart in County Down. For more information on Lord Castlereagh see: John Bew, *Castlereagh: Enlightenment, War and Tyranny*, (London: Quercus, 2011).

[149] *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, July 31, 1814.

[150] Petition urging the Abolition of Negro Slavery, C. 1824, Goff Family Correspondence, D1762/50, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland; *Belfast News-Letter*, March 25, 1828; June 13, 1828; July 15, 1828.

national and local Quakers also contributed to the influence that the British campaign was having on Belfast's local anti-slavery sentiment. National abolitionist material was sent, by request, to the town's Quakers.[151] The town's press also frequently published details relating to the meetings of prominent anti-slavery societies throughout Britain, including the London and Edinburgh Societies, and smaller societies such as Norfolk.[152] However, the British campaign would have its largest influence in the 1830s, due to the establishment of the Belfast Foreign and Anti-slavery society in 1830. The BASS was an active society with its members being some of the town's most prominent citizens. The society held regular meetings in the town, often mentioned in the press, in which they discussed the barbarities of slavery, with demands for its abolition. The BASS would quickly become a part of the wider British abolitionist network with members of the society communicating regularly with those from the British Anti-Slavery Society. James Standfield, the Anglican layman and Secretary of the Belfast Anti-Slavery Society, regularly sent reports to Thomas Pringle, the secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society in London. These reports included interviews with the BASS members, including Robert Tennent. In 1833, members from the BASS became directly involved in the British campaign when they were sent to London as part of a delegation in the lead up to the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act, which would see slavery abolished in the British Empire.[153]

In 1833, one of the stalwarts of the British abolition campaign, William Wilberforce, passed away. The town's press covered the attempts by societies in England to raise funds for memorials. However, there was little enthusiasm for celebrating Wilberforce's life – like that seen in the national press – as one might have expected demonstrating that there was still a division between the national and local campaign despite a cordial relationship.[154]

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[151] *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 1826, Pike Papers, D3491/A/4, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[152] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, May 7, 1825; July 11, 1825; October 31, 1825; December 26, 1825.
[153] 'To the Friends of the Anti-Slavery Cause in Ireland', 1833, James Tennent Papers, D1748/G/282/1, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[154] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, August 26, 1833; October 9, 1833; November 6, 1833*; Belfast News-Letter*, October 8, 1833; November 26, 1833; December 6, 1833; *Northern Herald*, October 19, 1833.

Conclusion

Belfast's anti-slavery sentiment in the early nineteenth century existed during a period of transition for the town. In the early 1800s the town was moving on from the radicalism seen in the 1790s. Combined with the immigration into the town – due to industrialisation and lack of opportunities in the hinterlands – its population grew considerably. This growth contributed to the creation of more local newspapers, such as the *Northern Herald*, which gave a voice to local Catholics who had not previously been represented within the town's press. In these new publications, it became clear that abolition was supported by an array of local citizens. However, support was not only limited to the town's Presbyterians and Catholics. During the 1820s, local Quakers had become more involved with the national campaign by creating and sending petitions to parliament and having anti-slavery materials sent to them by other Quakers in Britain. While the number of Quakers in the town remained small, the early eighteenth century marked the beginning of their involvement in the national abolition campaign, which would gain significance in the late 1830s and 40s.

Support for abolition would become more unified in the town with the formation of the BASS in 1830 being notable. Its establishment meant that Belfast's anti-slavery sentiment now had a 'face' that could unite and highlight the town's views to the British parliament – which it did in 1833 when a delegation went to London in the lead up to the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act.[155] Such organised support in this period was very different to that seen in the eighteenth century where support existed for abolition among individuals within the town. This change occurred due to several reasons. These included growing national support for abolition which gave locals more confidence regarding their campaigning. Also significant to this confidence, was the growing importance of the town due to its developing industries and the substantial increase in popular protest in this period.

[155] 'To the Friends of the Anti-Slavery Cause in Ireland', 1833, James Tennent Papers, D1748/G/282/1, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.

In 1832, the power of the BASS and the town's abolitionist sentiment was seen, when its members refused to vote for an MP who would not support abolition. The topic was considered important enough that it was discussed by the nominees publicly in the lead up to the election. It is evident that the local campaign was influenced by the wider British campaign, as the BASS was more organised than any previous local activity and had communication with other British societies. Furthermore, local abolitionists were also beginning to use their votes as a means to garner more political support for abolition, much like the British campaign had been doing for decades. However, in many ways Belfast abolitionists still separated themselves from the national campaign and were greatly influenced by local politics and ideology.

While abolition retained its anti-slavery support from the 1700s, the ideology driving its support did change somewhat. In the 1700s, abolition had been connected with the ideology surrounding the 'Irish slaves', and this continued into the 1800s. Yet, despite this ideology remaining connected to the town's anti-slavery sentiment a division had emerged. For years, Presbyterians had retained the inherited memories of the penal years and as a result many viewed the union positively due to the benefits seen within the town. This acceptance of the Union and the town's growing 'Britishness' was also affected by a developing fear in Ulster regarding the power of the Catholic Church if Catholics gained emancipation. While many of these fears were brought to the town by those migrating from rural areas, it held sway and saw increased local sectarianism.

The fracturing of the Irish slave mentalité could only affect the sense of Britishness in Belfast, with Catholics feeling increasingly isolated from the developing relationship – between Britain and Belfast. While a significant number of citizens in the previous century – Catholics and Dissenters – had been connected by their own mistreatment, this relationship was greatly affected by the changes and distancing from the previous ideology of the town's Presbyterians.

As result, the 'Irish slave' mentalité continued to thrive, yet was fractured by local issues. While these issues affected support for Catholic emancipation abolition was the one

area where many in the town seemed to be in agreement. Growing support for the cause saw the formation of the town's first official anti-slavery society demonstrating that the town's sentiment had evolved from the fractured support of the previous century. Yet the one theme which had filtered through was the inherited memories of the penal laws which allowed the Irish slave ideology to thrive – though fragmented.

Chapter Three

"The atrocious system should come to an end": Abolitionism in Early Victorian Belfast, 1837-1857

British anti-slavery support in the early Victorian period has become a popular topic for historians in recent years, due to an increased interest in anti-slavery ideology.[1] By the mid-Victorian period, anti-slavery had become an inherent part of British national identity, following the abolishment of slavery throughout the empire in 1833.[2] Richard Huzzey has observed that neither anti-slavery ideology nor enthusiasm for the cause collapsed following the 1833 Act, despite indifference.[3] However, while Victorian anti-slavery thinking and support have begun to gain more academic attention, research into support for anti-slavery in Ireland – and particularly that in the North – has been limited.[4] Events such as the great famine, the rise of the Young Irelanders and later, the Fenians, have, for understandable reasons, dominated academic attention.[5]

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[1] Richard Huzzey has discussed the formation of a British anti-slavery ideology by the early Victorian period. He details how the use of 'ideology' is key as it refers to the groups of ideas which detail the sin of slavery. "Describing anti-slavery as an ideology recognizes the variety of opinions, methods, and definitions that could be accommodated around a core set of beliefs." See: Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, 8.

[2] See: Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, 5-9. The Act was passed in August 1833 and came into effect in August 1834.

[3] Ibid., 5-6.

[4] Some research has been completed on Belfast anti-slavery. See: Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-*Slavery; Ritchie, 'Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism'; Rodgers, *Equiano*; Daniel Ritchie, "Antislavery Orthodoxy: Isaac Nelson and the Free Church of Scotland, *c*. 1843–65", *The Scottish Historical Review*, XCIV, 1, No. 238, (April 2015): 74–99; Daniel Ritchie, ""The Stone in the Sling": Frederick Douglass and Belfast Abolitionism", *American Nineteenth Century History*, 18, No. 3, (Sept., 2017): 245-272. For more information on anti-slavery ideology see: Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, 206-213; Howard Temperley, 'The Ideology of Anti-Slavery', in *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Origins and Effects in Europe, Africa and Americas*, ed. by David Eltis and James Walvin, (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1981), 21-35; Howard Temperley, 'Capitalism, Slavery and Ideology', *Past and Present*, 75, No. 1, (May 1977): 94-118.

[5] For more on the great famine, Young Irelanders, and the Fenians see, in chronological order: León Ó Broin, *Revolutionary Underground: The Story of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, 1858-1924*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1976); Cormac Ó'Gráda, *The Great Irish Famine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); R. V. Comerford, *The Fenians in Context: Irish Politics and Society, 1848-82*, (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1998); Christine Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine: Impact, Ideology and Rebellion*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Ciarán Ó Murchadha, *The Great Famine: Ireland's Agony 1845-1852*, (London: A&C Black, 2011); Christine Kinealy, *Repeal and Revolution: 1848 in Ireland*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

The early Victorian period witnessed significant issues and tensions in Ireland. These included sectarianism, which was rife in the north where the majority of Protestants congregated and where inter-religious tensions between various branches of Christianity were more pronounced. The increase in sectarianism was largely the result of mass migration from the rural areas in the first decades of the century.[6] In the last fifteen years there has been a growing academic interest in sectarianism in Victorian Belfast.[7] This is most welcome, as the increase in sectarianism and other local and national issues significantly impacted upon the fortunes of anti-slavery thought and action in Belfast, conditioning the nature and extent of support.

The nineteenth century saw improvements in the political, economic and cultural relationship between Belfast and Britain.[8] The augmented relationship also saw Belfast – and Ireland at large – playing a direct role in the national campaign to end slavery worldwide. Following the Slavery Abolition Act, American slavery became a cause célèbre and featured prominently in Belfast's anti-slavery thought. Local abolitionists sought to end American slavery. Indeed, American slavery would be one of the major reasons why abolitionism remained so active in this period, including the forging of ties between Belfast and American abolitionists. We will encounter this theme in different contexts.

Despite the continuing existence of local abolitionists, there have been limited studies of Belfast's anti-slavery activity in this period and none on the overall development of Belfast's anti-slavery sentiment in the early Victorian period.[9] To fill this lacuna this

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[6] Hirst, *Religion, Politics and Violence*, 19.
[7] See, in chronological order: Kinealy and MacAtasney, *The Hidden Famine*; Hirst, *Religion, Politics and Violence*; Bew, *Glory of Being Britons*; Hughes, *The Scots in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast*; Sean Farrell, *Rituals and Riots: Sectarian Violence and Political Culture in Ulster, 1784-1886*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015); Wright, *The 'Natural Leaders'*.
[8] Belfast's improved economy greatly accounted for the migration from the hinterlands into the town. During the period of this chapter Belfast Harbour was deepened twice to allow larger ships to sail up into the town. This led to the creation of Donegall Quay, and the formation of Victorian Square, Albert Square and Corporation Square. The changes to the town's harbour resulted in Belfast becoming one of the largest ports in Britain and Ireland which in turn enabled it to become one of the foremost industrial towns throughout the British Isles. See: Jamie Johnston, *Victorian Belfast*, (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1993), 21.
[9] Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery*; Rodgers, *Equiano*; Ritchie, 'Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism'; Ritchie, 'Antislavery Orthodoxy', 74–99; Ritchie, '"The Stone in the Sling"', 245-272.

chapter will examine the town's anti-slavery sentiment in the first twenty years of Queen Victoria's reign. Key questions of this chapter include: Did growing sectarianism affect Belfast's anti-slavery sentiment? What impact did religion have upon Belfast's anti-slavery support? What organisations and/or publications pursued an anti-slavery agenda? Did the 'Irish slave' ideology still exist in this period and if so did it continue to underpin anti-slavery support? Developments in local industries, religion and religious tensions all had considerable influence upon Belfast during the Victorian period, and these changes made Belfast unique in Ireland. This chapter will demonstrate that early Victorian Belfast was a town which existed within a British bubble in a Catholic country. Yet, the town's historic years under the penal code created links with the rest of the isle that were hard to shake off. This was despite the growing influence of the conservative elements within the town. Identities could be confused and conflictual. John Bew, for example, has addressed the difficulties facing the local liberals and identity in this period thus:

> In the years between the Great Reform Act and the Irish Famine, liberal politics in Ulster were defined by the search for a unifying political language which would transcend existing Irish modes of identification.[10]

This chapter will demonstrate that a combination of local and national contexts influenced anti-slavery sentiment and support in Belfast in the early nineteenth century, with local factors playing a vital role.

Anti-Slavery Support in early Victorian Belfast

In the mid nineteenth century Belfast's anti-slavery sentiment existed amidst various strands of continuing anti-slavery thought. Following Queen Victoria's ascension to the throne in

[10] Bew, *Glory of Being Britons*, 95. In regard to the use of terms 'liberal' and 'conservative' in this chapter, it means those who demonstrate an attachment to the ideology rather than those who are members or supporters of the Liberal or Conservative parties. Where members or supporters of the party are discussed, the word will be capitalised.

1837, anti-slavery was one area which continued to reflect the liberal and reformist tendencies seen in the early nineteenth century. The first year of Victoria's reign coincided with fifty years of anti-slavery support in Belfast, a cause greatly influenced by politics, local and national. The town's anti-slavery sentiment had always been significant, whether it was used purely to demonstrate altruistic support for others who were robbed of their 'natural rights' or to throw light on the inequities of the penal laws. In the late 1830s Belfast's anti-slavery sentiment continued for varied reasons. These were primarily due to the organisational activities of the Belfast Anti-Slavery Society (BASS) and the attention placed on abolition by the local press with much criticism directed towards the British apprenticeship system in the late 1830s. Increased support of the town's 'Britishness' and Belfast's connection with Britain would also influence anti-slavery support in the period, with local Protestant identity being revised due to the developing relationship between it and Britain.

It has been demonstrated in previous chapters of this thesis that anti-slavery was at times used as a political weapon in Belfast in the mid to late 1830s – much like in the eighteenth century – yet, support for abolition remained frequent among both liberals and conservatives.[11] The employment of anti-slavery rhetoric in establishing identity was seen in the eighteenth century when it was utilised for promotion of the theme of the 'Irish slaves'. The use of anti-slavery in relation to local citizens' identity, and particularly in the way it was employed in the establishment of a British identity, is a theme which would encourage anti-slavery sentiment in the late 1830s and 40s.

Following his election in 1832, the Conservative Belfast constituent James Emerson Tennent had frequently demonstrated his support for the town's 'Britishness' with anti-slavery often used as a political weapon to promote it.[12] With mass migration bringing

[11] *Guardian and Constitutional Advocate*, September 17, 1830; To the Friends of the Anti-Slavery Cause in Ireland, 1833. James Tennent Papers, D1748/G/282/1, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[12] Emerson Tennent was able to be nominated due to the 1832 Great Reform Act. For more information regarding the 1832 Reform Act see: Pearce, *Reform!*; Evans, *The Great Reform Act*; Frasier, *The Drama of the Great Reform Bill 1832*. Tennent running as a Tory candidate caused tensions, as he had previously aimed to be nominated for the Whigs. However, he was beaten by his

increased sectarianism, alongside political movements igniting tensions – such as O'Connell's Repeal Association – it is not surprising that local conservatives and liberals aimed to increase support for the town's 'Britishness'.[13] In 1834, Emerson Tennent debated the 1801 Act of Union with O'Connell in the House of Commons:

> I shall never fail to regard it as a proud distinction that I have myself been enabled, during the course, of the last twelve months, to contribute my own humble vote, to extend the blessings of freedom from the confines of India to the remotest shores of the Atlantic; to liberate the Hindoo, and to strike off the fetters of the African…Is it no accession of dignity to an Irish member of this House that he sits here to legislate, not merely for his own little island, but for the interests of the most opulent and powerful empire in the universe?...by the Act of Union, he has been enabled to become an advocate of the rights of the whole human race, and to co-operate in extending the reign of liberty from hemisphere to hemisphere…whilst we pride ourselves upon our birth-place as Irishmen, to add to our distinctions, the glory of being Britons.[14]

John Bew has observed that O'Connell had argued that "Ireland had its own glory"[15] in regard to its anti-slavery movement, yet Emerson Tennent contended that Ireland's anti-slavery sentiment and activity was mostly incidental in ending the trade. Rather, he argued that it was the actions of Britain and its navy which had actually abolished the trade.[16]

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family member Robert James Tennent. See: *Emerson Tennent Papers*, 1773-1916, D2922, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland. During the 1832 Belfast elections, anti-slavery sentiment played a significant role in the nominees being supported, see: *Northern Whig*, December 20, 1832.

[13] This was largely due to the benefits of the Union with Britain and also fears surrounding the potential strength and power of the Catholic Church in Ireland following Catholic emancipation in 1829. Daniel O'Connell's Repeal Association which aimed to repeal the Union also caused serious tensions with both the town's conservatives and liberals, as both groups supported the Union. See: Bew, *Glory of Being Britons*, 95-160.

[14] *Repeal of the Union: Report of the debate in the House of Commons, on Mr. O'Connell's motion: and the proceedings in the House of Lords on Earl Grey's motion for concurring in the address of the Commons: April 1834*, (London: Charles Knight, 1834), 94.

[15] Bew, *Glory of Being Britons*, 136.

[16] Daniel O'Connell, 'Speech Against Colonial Slavery', in *Great Irish Voices: Over Four Hundred Years of Great Irish Oratory*, ed. by Gerard Reid, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999), 342-3; Bew, *Glory of Being Britons*, 136-7.

Emerson Tennent, in effect was using the success of anti-slavery and its popularity in Belfast to attract more support for Britain and the town's increasing "Britishness". He was not alone in his methods.

The use of abolition as a political weapon was not limited to Ireland, with British politicians also displaying similar tactics. In February 1838, two local liberal newspapers the *Chronicle* and *Whig*, published articles in support of a speech given by Lord Brougham, a British Whig and prominent anti-slavery campaigner.[17] In addition, the papers touched upon the criticism made of Brougham by the British conservative newspapers, namely that they believed Whigs like Brougham ignored the suffering at home while attention was directed abroad towards the slaves. Basically, Tories argued that by supporting abolition, Whigs were ignoring issues at home. Both local liberal papers disagreed with this view and argued that the Tories regularly used liberal support of abolition as a tool to accuse the Whigs of hypocrisy. To validate their argument, the *Northern Whig* published an excerpt of an article first published in the English newspaper the *Standard*:

> Lord Brougham made an eloquent and very effective speech, last night, upon the horrors of the slave trade. The topic is an inviting one, to all who wish to make an impression by striking a painful description, and it is therefore much in favour with ambitious schoolmasters and schoolboys…we are not without hope that if Lord Brougham continues to exercise himself a few years longer on behalf of the African Negroes, he may at length come to cast an eye of compassion upon the British poor, and the slaves of the British factories.[18]

The *Whig* went on to claim that the comments made by the *Standard* were "most excellent Toryism" as the Tories have "never shown much sympathy with the oppressed" and if they had got their way "slavery would be flourishing, rankly and luxuriantly, in our own

[17] *Northern Whig*, February 3, 1838; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, February 3, 1838.
[18] *Northern Whig*, February 3, 1838.

Colonies." Clearly, both sides were adept at using slavery and abolition as tools to attack the opposition. That contemporary politicians were adept in using anti-slavery to further their own political agenda is readily apparent. Furthermore, it serves as an example that British (and Belfast's) anti-slavery agitation in the Victorian period "was a complex network of interests and agendas…and [we need] to understand it as a shifting patchwork of alliances."[19]

In 1838, the use of anti-slavery sentiment to promote Britishness was seen with the publication of the poem "Appeal to the Ladies of Ireland", in the *Whig*.[20] The poem – very similar to "The Abolition of the Slave Trade", published in 1807 – described the horror of slavery while also displaying the author's own political and social views.[21] In "Appeal to the Ladies of Ireland" the author's views highlight the shifts in political and ideological positions and the resulting complications that had taken place in Belfast since the turn of the century. Simultaneously, it demonstrated how anti-slavery sentiment had managed to survive within the changing town – liberty:

> We dreamt we saw her fetters breaking,
> We called our Negro sister – free!
> But, from our pleasant slumber waking,
> We find her still in slavery;
> And prisons, bonds, and scourges, still
> Await her, at her tyrant's will.
>
> Our nation's wealth, so freely given,
> Has purchased but our nation's shame;

[19] Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, 7. Also see, in chronological order: David Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-Slavery: 1780-1860*, (London: Routledge, 1991), 4-5, 227-228; Brown, *Moral Capital*, 459.
[20] *Northern Whig*, March 20, 1838.
[21] *Belfast News-Letter,* February 6, 1807.

And misery, that sounds to Heaven,

Is taunted with an empty name;

And can we sit unheeding by,

Nor pity when our sister's cry?

No! While our British hearts are swelling

With joys no slave can ever know;

And while our British tongues are telling

The birth-right blessings we can shew [sic]

Then let those hearts and tongues unite,

To seek our injured sister's right.

Lift, like a trumpet, lift your voices,

Ye wives and mothers of our isle,

Till every Negro wife rejoices,

And every mother learns to smile,

And feels *that* feeling – now unknown –

Her child, her husband, are her own!

No passing dream, no empty vision,

Again must o'er our senses creep,

Till we have burst our sister's prison;

And lay her fetters in the deep,

And every son of Afric [sic] be

That which his God has made him – free!

Women of Erin! – Let us never

The cry for liberty give o'er,

Till slavery sinks, and sinks for ever,
And man shall wear a chain no more –
Save one, whose lasting link shall bind,
In bonds of love, all human kind.[22]

In the poem, the changes in local views are represented in the third stanza where the author described Ireland's women as having both "British hearts" and "tongues", which demonstrated their support of the British connection. Yet, while there were changes in how they viewed themselves, the significance of liberty remained apparent with the theme discussed in the sixth stanza, "Let us never The cry for liberty give o'er…". Furthermore, in the fourth and sixth stanzas, emphasis is also placed on the author's sense of Irishness: "of our isle…[and the] Women of Erin!...". The use of such terms within an anti-slavery poem demonstrates that in this period Belfast was in an unusual position of being both British and Irish, further demonstrating that anti-slavery was wrapped up in local confusion over identity, or in multiple identity. That the author is promoting both British and Irish values, demonstrates the situation that some supporters – male and female – found themselves in in regard to nationality. They were supportive of the Union and 'Britishness' while also feeling a residual connection to Ireland.[23] In effect Belfast citizens were caught between two worlds – past (Irish) and present (British) – with local anti-slavery sentiment straddling both.

It is apparent that Belfast's anti-slavery sentiment in this period was convoluted and entangled with local opinions regarding identity. This was not new, as identity and liberty had long been formative parts of the town's anti-slavery sentiment. With the development in the town's official anti-slavery society (BASS), identity and liberty would be themes that would continue throughout the period under study. Identity and liberty are themes that we encounter in different contexts.

[22] *Northern Whig*, March 20, 1838.
[23] *Belfast News-Letter,* February 6, 1807.

BAAS and criticism of apprenticeship

Following its establishment in 1830 the BASS brought organisational coherence to the town's local anti-slavery sentiment. In 1837, members of the town's anti-slavery society reaffirmed their commitment to abolition:

> …while slavery exists, under any form, however modified, or however sanctioned, we will never relax from our efforts, nor swerve from our purpose, to exert that influence which we may collectively or individually possess, to effect, by all legitimate means, its immediate and entire abolition.[24]

The society acted as an official outlet to the town's long-held anti-slavery views. Some of the liberal aspects of the eighteenth century anti-slavery sentiment – notably liberty – survived within the society, against a backdrop of growing religious tensions between the town's Catholics and Protestants.[25] The call for liberty as a central tenet of abolitionist outlooks is evident at a May 1840 BASS meeting:

> We stand up, not for a liberty of a portion of the human race, but for liberty all over the world – the liberty of Jesus, the liberty to be, to do, and to suffer, according to the will of God – the liberty that places all on the same level – the rich rejoicing that they are brought low, and the poor that they are exalted, and both knowing, that the fashion of this world and its beauty pass away.[26]

A belief in liberty and freedom to serve God produced a critique of the British apprenticeship system that was perceived as a form of slavery. The anti-apprenticeship

[24] *Northern Whig*, November 7, 1837.
[25] The society had a significant impact on Belfast's political arena in the 1830s, with the BASS's leadership only nominating candidates for MP if they supported the abolition of slavery. See: *Correspondence of [Rev. Dr] John Edgar*, October 19, 1832, Tennent Papers, D1748/G/180/1A, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[26] *Northern Whig*, May 23, 1840.

campaign was a significant factor in the town's continuing anti-slavery sentiment in the Victorian period.

Following the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833, the apprenticeship system came into force. Devised to be "instituted in the interval between slavery and emancipation to prepare the slaves to assume the duties of freemen" [27] the plan was intensely disliked by ardent British abolitionists as they believed that it was not suitable in preparing slaves for freedom. During the apprentice period slaves were to be educated and converted to the Christian faith, which had been denied to many. House slaves were to be apprenticed for four years and field slaves for six years – children under the age of six were to be freed immediately. Critics identified several problems with apprenticeship.[28]

Latimer, for example, observed that the apprenticeship period instead of helping the slaves, acted "as a device to defeat, rather than advance the Imperial Government's idea of giving the slaves more useful spiritual, and educational preparation for final emancipation."[29] While supposed to ease the transition from slavery to freedom, apprenticeship was seen as an attempt by the British government to ease the effects of emancipation on the production of West Indian sugar – a market dominated by slave labour.[30] The experiences of many apprentices was bleak due to the conditions in workhouses, with planters using the workhouses as a means to exercise control.[31] As a result, the system caused slaves to develop disrespect for the law and religion as they had spent years watching "constant violations of these two institutions by colonial proprietors and magistrates."[32]

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[27] James Latimer, 'The Apprenticeship System in the British West Indies', *The Journal of Negro Education*, 33, No. 1 (Winter, 1964), 52-57 (p. 52).
[28] Ibid., 52.
[29] Ibid., 53.
[30] Marika Sherwood, *After Abolition: Britain and the Slave Trade Since 1807*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 148.
[31] Claudius K. Fergus, *Revolutionary Emancipation: Slavery and Abolitionism in the British West Indies*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 175.
[32] Latimer, 'The Apprenticeship System', 53.

In 1833, the BASS issued a harsh condemnation of the defects, as it saw them, of the Abolition of Slavery Act. BASS argued that the apprenticeship system did not fit its blueprint for immediate emancipation. In addition, it was indignant that twenty million pounds in compensation was being paid to the slaveholders.[33] Several years later, BASS remained critical of the treatment of the slaves under the apprenticeship system. In 1837 the society called upon Belfast's citizens to once again "aid them in their efforts for having the emancipation act carried out, and their fellow-subjects in the West Indian Islands emancipated in reality, and not in name."[34] That same year, the society held a large meeting in th**e** town's Lancastrian School House.[35] It was forcibly argued that under the apprenticeship system that was operating in the West Indies, conditions for slaves were worse than they had been under slavery:

> [The BASS has] the personal evidence of Joseph Sturge, who went to the West Indies to collect the information. He says the stipulation of the British Government has been fulfilled, the money has been paid for the liberation of the slaves, and the interest too—the conditions required the slaves have been fulfilled to the letter, but they are as badly treated before. He here gave an instance of the cruelty practised on the slaves at the tread mill, and by flogging and said that was a specimen of the emancipation for which Britain paid twenty millions sterling. It was [the BASS's] duty now to bring forward to the details of what is actually occurring in the West Indies…and if the people had a spark of proper feeling, they would rise up in one mass to demand the immediate abolition of such things.[36]

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[33] *Guardian, and Constitutional Advocate*, July 9, 1833. Other Belfast citizens such as MP James Emerson Tennent supported the compensation measures. Emerson Tennent believed that the planters deserved compensation as it was the British government who had at one time "compelled the colonists to keep slaves". See: *James E. Tennent to C. Stuart. Printed letter,* 1832, D923/4, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[34] *Northern Whig*, November 4, 1837. The apprenticeship system would end in August 1838.
[35] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, November 4, 1837; *Northern Whig*, November 4, 1837; *Belfast News-Letter*, November 7, 1837.
[36] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, November 4, 1837.

In 1837, a pamphlet titled *Narrative of Events* was published.[37] In Belfast, the *Narrative* horrified local anti-slavery supporters due to it detailing the experiences of James Williams, an apprentice in Jamaica, under the British apprentice system. They were not alone. The *Narrative* would be used by the respected Quaker abolitionist Joseph Sturge and the national abolition campaign in the battle against the apprenticeship system.[38] In addition, its publication led to an official investigation into Williams allegations.[39] The Belfast press were appalled at the apparent mistreatment of the apprentices and referenced Williams' narrative:

> …if its terms had been faithfully observed by the planters, the friends of the negro would have patiently awaited the termination of the six years; but…the planters have violated grossly and scandalously the contract…The testimony of Mr. Sturge and his companions, corrobora'ed [sic] by that of the missionaries, and confirmed by the official investigation into the case of James Williams, shows that systematic violation and evasion of the spirit of the abolition act of have been all but universal in our colonies.[40]

Due to the significant public criticism directed by the national abolition campaign (which included the BASS) alongside official investigations, the apprenticeship system was abolished in 1838. During the debates in the House of Commons on whether to abolish the apprenticeship system, a meeting of the BASS took place in Belfast in June. The meeting made clear the society's position:

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[37] James Williams, *A Narrative of Events, since the First of August, 1834, by James Williams, an Apprenticed Labourer in Jamaica,* (London: J. Rider, 1837).
[38] Huzzey, *Freedom* Burning, 11.
[39] Henrice Altink, 'Slavery by Another Name: Apprenticed Women in Jamaican Workhouses in the Period 1834-8', *Social History*, 26, No. 1 (2001): 40-59, (p. 41).
[40] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, May 21, 1838. Also see: *Belfast News-Letter*, May 25, 1838; *Northern Whig*, April 3, 1838.

> In urging the adoption of the resolution, the Reverend speaker related a number of facts to show the withering influence the atrocious system exerts over the finest feelings of human nature…He said that slavery had long enough been a blot in the escutcheon of Britain, the land of liberty and it was full time the atrocious system should come to an end.[41]

The apprenticeship system's downfall later that year was predominantly due to critics within the official abolitionist organisations (including the BASS) arguing that the system did not mean freedom, but instead slavery by another name. The BASS was vocal in its criticism of apprenticeship believing it to be a method by which former slaves were still controlled and ill-treated by their former masters. For many, apprenticeship made a mockery of the 1833 Act. The foundation of BASS and its role in the campaign against the apprenticeship system were two of the reasons behind the continuation of the town's abolitionist sentiment.

Belfast Press

With the end of the apprenticeship system in 1838, Belfast abolitionists focused their attention on worldwide slavery, and most especially on slavery in America. This interest was most likely due to the number of Irish emigrants in the United States and the volume of slave stories reported in the British press. The BASS may have been the official voice of the town's abolitionist sentiment, but in many respects the Belfast press was the heart of local anti-slavery agitation. From the eighteenth-century Belfast newspapers promoted varying levels of egalitarian ideology which included themes of liberty and natural rights. While religious and political conservatism had been on the increase since the 1820s, liberty relating to the abolition of slavery remained prominent. The long running anti-slavery sentiment of

[41] *Belfast News-Letter*, June 22, 1838.

the town's press was one of the most influential factors behind Belfast's anti-slavery thought in the initial years of Victoria's reign.

Following the Abolition of Slavery Act in 1833, the town's newspapers continued levelling criticism on both the slave system abroad and the apprentice system in the British colonies. These attacks were a central feature of local anti-slavery propaganda. While long-term newspapers such as the *News-Letter* continued with their frequent critiques of slavery, recently established newspapers such as the Catholic *Vindicator* (founded in 1839) also regularly promoted anti-slavery outlooks.[42] The *Whig*, *Commercial Chronicle*, *News-Letter* and *Vindicator* regularly published information relating to other prominent anti-slavery societies throughout Britain and published their own anti-slavery views.[43]

In September 1839, the *Vindicator*, for example, carried an article by the Quaker abolitionist Joseph Sturge, regarding a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.[44] The meeting was attended by Andrew Stephenson, the American minister and a supporter of slavery. Both Stephenson's attendance and speech at the Society's meeting greatly displeased Sturge and the *Vindicator* agreed with his sentiments. Stephenson had claimed that "America and England were bound together by strong and glorious ties – they were allied in blood, religion, habits, and associations – they worshipped the same God, and in the same manner."[45] Sturge took great umbrage at Stephenson's claim, and argued that the "habits and associations" in "slave-dealing America" were nothing like the habits and beliefs in Britain and Ireland, and to be compared to them was the "deepest insult".

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[42] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, January 11, 1837; June 5, 1837; *Belfast News-Letter*, May 19, 1837; *Northern Whig*, May 20, 1837; May 23, 1837; June 1, 1837; March 20, 1838. The *Vindicator* was established in 1839 and was aimed towards the town's increasing Catholic population. The newspaper regularly showed support for abolition. See: *Vindicator* May 1, 1839; May 4, 1839; *Vindicator*, October 26, 1839; May 4, 1839.

[43] *Northern Whig*, October 31, 1837; April 5, 1838; June 21, 1838; *Belfast News-Letter*, December 1, 1837; August 18, 1837; April 27, 1838; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, March 22, 1837; May 14, 1838; *Vindicator*, October 26, 1839; May 4, 1839.

[44] For more information on Joseph Sturge see, in chronological order: Henry Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, (London: Partridge, 1864); Richard Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Victorian Britain*, (London: Helm, 1987).

[45] *Vindicator*, September 14, 1839.

Sturge's views of slavery and of Stephenson were clear: "The only charge against these negroes is endeavouring to obtain that liberty which they have never forfeited, and to which they have as much right as the American minister himself."[46] The *Vindicator*'s editor concurred, adding a note at the end of Sturge's article that Daniel O'Connell had also previously expressed his own views over Stephenson's support of slavery. Regarding Stephenson, O'Connell had asked "Is it possible that America would send a man who traffics in blood, and who, if he do, would be a disgrace to human nature?"[47] Immediately following the article which reported the meeting in London, the *Vindicator* then went on to publish advertisements – first printed in the American press – which demanded the return of runaway slaves and further demonstrated how slaves were treated as property, rather than human beings.

For much of the town's press, criticism of American slavery remained a primary focus of local abolitionist agitation. An example of this was seen in February 1839 when the *Commercial Chronicle* published an article which discussed slavery in the United States:

> A series of resolutions have been passed, with too little opposition, having for their object to quash every inquiry into the question of slavery, and avowedly to prevent any amelioration in the condition of slaves in the United States, and this, a land boasting of the enjoyment of political liberty![48]

These "odious" resolutions were in response to the District of Columbia creating and spreading petitions demanding an end to American slavery. The *Chronicle*'s anger resulted from the resolutions disregarding the petitions:

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[46] *Vindicator*, September 14, 1839.
[47] Ibid., September 14, 1839.
[48] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, February 4, 1839.

> Resolved, therefore—That every petition, memorial, resolution, proposition or paper, touching or relating, in any way, or any extent whatever, to slavery as aforesaid, or the abolition thereof, shall on the presentation thereof, without any further action thereon, be Laid on the table without printing, reading, debate, or reference.[49]

Anger at the resolutions and that they passed so easily is clear, and is particularly distinct at the end of the article: "These resolutions were not all carried without opposition; but those who opposed them did not utter a syllable in condemnation of the atrociously disgraceful system…"[50]

The *Commercial Chronicle* was not alone in its critique of the American slave system. In July 1839, the *Whig* detailed the reasons why the American slave system was more odious than others. Primary disgust was felt at the sexual abuse of slaves, a significant number of whom had fairer complexions than even their masters.[51] The paper went on to give an example of a twelve-year-old child who was seen wandering a road in Louisville, Kentucky – a slave state. The twelve-year-old, carrying a child, was approached by a visitor who asked if she was a slave "as the circumstance of white people hiring themselves out for service [was] almost unknown".[52] She replied in the affirmative and stated that she was indeed a slave. The visitor was startled, as her complexion was as white as that of an English labourer's child, and it was not in any way discernible that she had African heritage.

That slaveowners could claim to own a person of African heritage was condemned by the town's press. Yet the disgust in attempting to own someone who clearly had more European heritage than African further demonstrated how corrupt American slavery was with the sexual abuse, lies and sale of 'white' children. Furthermore, it demonstrated the blurred lines in American slavery. The vague lack of distinction and the ability of slaveowners to lie about their slave's African ancestry encouraged Belfast's newspapers to continue their public

[49] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, February 4, 1839.
[50] Ibid., February 4, 1839.
[51] *Northern Whig*, July 18, 1839.
[52] Ibid., July 18, 1839.

criticism of slavery by arguing that there was no humanity involved, only greed and immorality. While the newspaper's belief that whiter skin made the situation worse and undoubtedly demonstrated a degree of racism (common in this period) it does not detract from the visible anti-slavery sentiment. For many anti-slavery supporters in this period, Africans did not deserve enslavement, but nor were they considered equal to white Europeans.[53] Due to local abhorrence of slavery, and particularly American slavery, the town's press would continue its criticism of slavery beyond the full emancipation of slaves in the British colonies in 1838. From the late 1830s, Belfast's press would regularly criticise slavery, in this way ensuring that abolitionism remained high on the local political agenda.

During the early 1840s, anti-slavery sentiment would endure throughout the town's press. This support for abolition was undoubtedly influenced by the visits of a selection of famous American abolitionists including Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, and the Revd Henry Clarke Wright.[54] The Presbyterian *Banner* – organ of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland (hereafter PCI) – remained frequently critical of slavery. In October 1844, the paper published a sketch – first seen in *Hood's Magazine* – which depicted a conversation between two British men in Brazil who held opposing views of slavery. The conversation centred around how the bodies of slaves were treated in Brazil and the Americas. During the conversation the pro-slavery supporter labelled slaves as "dogs", and when he noticed the disgusted reaction of the anti-slavery gentleman he argued that the disgusted man was no longer in Britain:

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[53] Richard Huzzey has observed that "Antiracism logically bred antislavery, but antislavery did not logically require antiracism". See: Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, 185.

[54] Wright visited Belfast in December 1844. Douglass visited between 1845-6 and Garrison visited in late 1846. For more information on Wright, Douglass and Garrison see, in chronological order: Gary Daniel Saretzky, 'Henry Clarke Wright: Non-resistant Abolitionist', (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1969); J. F. Maclear, 'Thomas Smyth, Frederick Douglass, and the Belfast Antislavery Campaign', *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 80, No. 4, (1979): 286-297; Lewis Perry, *Childhood, Marriage, and Reform Henry Clarke Wright*, 1797-1870, (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1980); Bill Rolston, 'Frederick Douglass: A black abolitionist in Ireland', *History Today*, 53, Issue. 6, (2003): 45-51; Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008); James Brewer Stewart, *William Lloyd Garrison at Two Hundred: History, Legacy, and Memory*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

> …you see it is quite different with the Brazilians. When a dog - I mean a negro - dies, they make his brethren in complexion put a rope around his neck, drag him down and heave him into the harbour.
>
> [The British man responded] Can such things be? Surely you don't say that similar things are done in the United States? Certainly men with a drop of Anglo-Saxon blood in their bodies could never be such monsters.[55]

The pro-slavery supporter replied that he had never been to the United States, however the English and American merchants he knows in Brazil "are no more tender-hearted than the native Brazilians". The *Banner*'s emotive article visibly displayed the paper's anti-slavery sentiments. Despite the relations between the BASS and the PCI foundering, the *Banner*'s anti-slavery stance had not. Furthermore, the paper was not alone in its condemnation of the abuse of slaves. Newspapers such as the *Whig* and *Vindicator* also regularly criticised slavery, particularly the violence directed at slaves and the mistreatment of those that attempted to help them.[56]

It is evident that Belfast's anti-slavery sentiment in the late 1830s and early 40s was influenced by several factors. These included tensions revolving around identity such as the town's increasing British outlook. Support for Britishness saw some anti-slavery supporters use the national campaign as a means to spread affection for Britain and the Union. Similarly, while not meaning to be, local anti-slavery rhetoric displayed the confusion that surrounded identity with a selection of citizens torn between the sentimentality of the past (Irishness/penal laws) and the present (Britishness/Union).

While influenced by identity, the BASS brought structural organisation to the town's anti-slavery support. With the society's strong connections to the national campaign to end the apprenticeship within the British colonies, the BASS was able to draw significant

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[55] *Banner of Ulster*, October 25, 1844.
[56] *Northern Whig*, October 29, 1844; *Vindicator*, January 8, 1845; January 15, 1845; January 18, 1845.

attention to the issues facing apprentices abroad. Access to abolitionist material and the society's ability to bring together a selection of individuals to speak meant that the local anti-slavery sentiment was more organised and coherent than had been seen previously. With the society irate at the treatment of former slaves in the colonies, the apprentice system served to make support more cohesive with the society focused on its abolition.

The town's press regularly featured support for the BASS. However, they also published material which enhanced the emotion around the town's anti-slavery sentiment with stories which helped locals relate more closely to the slaves. With official support enhanced by the organisation of the BASS, the press enhanced the 'sentiment' behind abolition by portraying the humanity of slaves and inhumanity of slaveowners. While British slavery had come to a complete end by 1838, with the abolishment of the apprenticeship system, Belfast's anti-slavery convictions were only strengthened by the support seen in the late 1830s. The contributing factors to Belfast's anti-slavery sentiment would become magnified in June 1840, due to the voluminous press coverage of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Convention in London.

The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery World Slavery Convention, 1840

In the first six months of 1840, anti-slavery remained a popular topic in the town's long established liberal and conservative press. Its prominence was further heightened when in June 1840 the national British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (hereafter, BFASS) hosted the World Slavery Convention in London. There was keen interest in the convention in Belfast, with its press reporting on the events leading up to the event. One article in the *News-Letter*, for example, detailed a meeting between John Harfield Tredgold (secretary of the BFASS) and King Louis Phillipe I of France, in which Tredgold asked the King to "take the earliest and most effective means of securing the abolition of the odious traffic in slaves, and the extinction of slavery itself."[57]

[57] *Belfast News-Letter,* June 2, 1840.

Support for the BFASS was apparent across the town's press, especially as the local BASS was an auxiliary to the national society.[58] Several weeks prior to the June Convention, a well-attended meeting of the BASS took place in Belfast. During the meeting members of the BASS discussed the formation of the BFASS and how the local society by "the help of that God who had formed all nations of the earth, and infused into their veins the one blood…would never cease their exertions, till slavery died– never, never to live in the world again."[59] The BASS referenced its clear support for the BFASS and its aims:

> [The BASS's Anglican Secretary, James Standfield] concurred in the opinion of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, that moral and religious means were the only efficient instruments for doing away with slavery. They had pledged themselves to give a preference to free-grown produce over slave-grown – to support the principle, that a slave should be free in every part of the British empire – and never to desist from their opposition to slavery, while a vestige of it remained on the civilized world…Not less than 150,000 Negroes were annually torn from their homes in Africa, to supply the Western world, and 50,000 for the Eastern market; to say nothing of the three hundred thousand, or upwards, who perish, every year, in wars in the interior, tormented by the slave-traders themselves. In the rice-swamps and cotton plantations of the Southern States of the American Union, the number of slaves was not under 3,000,000…while in the old slave-holding States of America, – Maryland, Virginia, &c., – the odious practice prevailed of breeding slaves for the market, without regard to either decency or shame.[60]

Standfield concluded his speech by discussing the upcoming convention and believed it would "be the best means of improving the condition of the African race…".

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[58] *Vindicator*, October 26, 1839; *Banner of Ulster*, June 27, 1843; *Northern Whig*, May 23, 1844; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, October 6, 1847.
[59] *Northern Whig*, May 23, 1840.
[60] Ibid., May 23, 1840.

The 1840 convention was, at that time, one of the most significant ever held and welcomed over five hundred respected abolitionists from countries such as the United States, Mauritius, Britain and Canada. Attendees included the renowned abolitionists Thomas Clarkson, John Scoble, Richard D. Webb, William Lloyd Garrison, Lucretia Mott and Daniel O'Connell.[61] Belfast's newspapers covered the convention in detail and regularly reported on the anti-slavery agitation of the BFASS and other British anti-slavery societies. Support for local and national campaigners was common, but one prominent anti-slavery supporter had long been a problematic figure locally – the Irish nationalist politician, Daniel O'Connell.[62] Unsurprisingly, the town's Catholic newspaper the *Vindicator* reported positively on O'Connell's anti-slavery crusade. One might assume that the town's conservative Presbyterian newspapers (particularly the *News-Letter*) would choose to omit

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[61] For more information on these prominent abolitionists see: Thomas Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, (London: J. Philips, 1786); Ellen Gibson Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson: A Biography*, (London: Macmillan, 1989). John Scoble was an English abolitionist who was would later be a secretary of the BFASS. See: James Heartfield, *The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1838–1956: A History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Richard D. Webb was a founder of the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society and prominent abolitionist. He exchanged letters with popular abolitionists and hosted Frederick Douglass when he visited Dublin in the summer of 1845. He also published several abolitionist tomes including Richard D. Webb, *The Life and Letters of Captain John Brown Who Was Executed at Charlestown, Virginia, in 1859, for an Armed Attack Upon American Slavery*, (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1861). William Lloyd Garrison was a prominent American abolitionist journalist, women's rights campaigner and social reformer. He was the editor of the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*. See: Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008); James Brewer Stewart, *William Lloyd Garrison at Two Hundred: History, Legacy, and Memory*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). Lucretia Mott was an American Quaker abolitionist, social reformer and women's rights campaigner. See, in chronological order: Daniel O'Connell, *Daniel O'Connell Upon American Slavery: With Other Irish Testimonies*, Vol 3, (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1860); Lloyd C. M. Hare, *The greatest American woman, Lucretia Mott*, (New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1937); Otelia Cromwell, *Lucretia Mott*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); Douglas C. Riach, 'Daniel O'Connell and American Anti-Slavery', *Irish Historical Studies*, 20, No. 77 (Mar., 1976): 3-25; Christine Kinealy, *Daniel O'Connell and the anti-slavery movement: 'The saddest people the sun sees'*, (London: Routledge, 2011).

[62] An Irish barrister Daniel O'Connell would become one of the most famous Irish political leaders of the nineteenth century. A reformist rather than a radical, O'Connell campaigned for Catholic emancipation which was granted in 1829. Following emancipation, O'Connell set his sights on the repeal of the Union between Britain and Ireland. In doing so he founded the Repeal Association which organised immense meetings around Ireland – sometimes attended by over 100,000 people. The Repeal Association threatened both the British government and northern Protestants, who feared the power of the Catholic Church if repeal was successful. Due to the influence O'Connell had in Ireland, he was arduously disliked by a section of conservative Protestants who believed him a threat to the Union. In 1841, he accepted an invitation by local Repealers to visit the town. However, he received threats of violence if he dared to "invade" the north. For more information see: C. M. O'Keeffe, *Life and Times of Daniel O'Connell: With Some Sketches of His Contemporaries, Volume 2,* (Dublin: John Mullany, 1864).

O'Connell's anti-slavery agitation due to his politics surrounding Catholic emancipation and the Repeal Association.[63] However, the conservative *News-Letter* (that arduously disliked O'Connell) backed his anti-slavery agitation. In 1838, for example, the *News-Letter* covered O'Connell's attendance at an anti-apprenticeship rally.[64] The paper was reticent in its usual criticism of O'Connell and instead commented that he delivered a speech "characterized by his accustomed ability and humour."[65] Prior to and during the 1840 convention support for O'Connell's anti-slavery views was widespread in the Belfast press.[66] That the town's conservative press could be positive about O'Connell, in any capacity, demonstrates the significant support abolition had within Belfast.

During the June convention attendees discussed in detail the hypocrisy of the United States being declared a country of liberty yet enslaving millions of its fellow human beings. The convention's attendees, and following it, the Belfast press placed significant importance on ending slavery in the United States:

> There was a not a single word in the declaration of independence of the United States which allowed or sanctioned the accursed principle that man can have a property in his fellow man. The American people were undoubtedly a brave and courageous people, but they had the moral, or rather the immoral, courage to insert a single word to that effect in their great charter… [Daniel O'Connell] dwelt at considerable length on the extent of slavery in the United States, and contrasted with great power the boasted love of freedom and justice which the American people are so fond of displaying, with their vagrant violation of every principle of both in the slave states.[67]

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[63] For more information O'Connell and his politics see, in chronological order: Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *Daniel O'Connell and the Repeal Year*, (Lexington: University press of Kentucky, 1966); Patrick Geoghegan, *King Dan,* (Dublin: Gill books, 2010); Kinealy, *Daniel O'Connell and the anti-slavery movement*; Patrick Geoghegan, *Liberator: The Life and Death of Daniel O'Connell 1830-1847,* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2012). For criticism of O'Connell in the conservative local press see: *Belfast News-Letter*, October 10, 1837; October 27, 1837; March 20, 1838; September 4, 1838.
[64] *Belfast News-Letter*, May 29, 1838.
[65] Ibid., May 29, 1838.
[66] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, September 2, 1839; *Northern Whig,* June 18, 1840; *Belfast News-Letter*, May 20, 1838; June 19, 1840; June 30, 1840.
[67] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, June 22, 1840.

In the months following the convention, anti-slavery articles continued to appear, partly due to the on-going impact of the Convention and also because of arrangements for a visit by members of the national Anti-Slavery Association (BFASS) to Ireland for later that October. The BFASS visit was made by three abolitionists, J. G Birney, H. B. Stanton and John Scoble, who had each attended the June Convention.[68] The purpose of the visits – to Dublin and Belfast – was to hear local opinion regarding the results of the emancipation of slavery in the British colonies.[69] The trip demonstrated that the BFASS, and Belfast, were becoming increasingly well-known as centres of anti-slavery sentiment.[70]

The Belfast visit was expected to be popular amongst locals and the event was well publicised, with the *News-Letter*, *Vindicator* and *Whig* all noting the event.[71] The *Chronicle* believed the visit would be significant:

> We have reason to believe, that the occasion will be one of the most interesting that has taken place in the town, as well from the presence of these eminent individuals and others who have proved themselves ardent friends of freedom throughout the world...[72]

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[68] Birney, an American, was well-regarded in abolitionist circles for having freed his own slaves in Kentucky, and therefore choosing to suffer considerable monetary loss. Stanton, also American, was a well-known social reformer and was the secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Englishman John Scoble was well-known in British abolitionist circles for having visited the colonies before emancipation and had exposed the cruelties he witnessed of the apprenticeship system. For more information on J. G. Birney and H. B. Stanton see, in chronological order: Henry Brewster Stanton, *Sketches of reforms and reformers, of Great Britain and Ireland*, (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1850); Betty Fladeland, *James Gillespie Birney: Slaveholder to Abolitionist*. Ithaca, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1955); D. Laurence Rogers, *Apostles of Equality: The Birneys, the Republicans and the Civil War. Lansing,* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2011).
[69] *Belfast News-Letter*, October 23, 1840.
[70] In 1840, the BASS became an auxiliary to the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. See: *John Edgar to Joseph Cooper*, May 14, 1840, B.F.A.S.S. papers, Mss.Brit.Emp.S.18.C92/36, Rhodes House, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University, Oxford, England.
[71] *Belfast News-Letter*, October 23, 1840; *Northern Whig*, October 27, 1840; *Vindicator*, October 24, 1840.
[72] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, October 26, 1840.

The *Chronicle* was not wrong, as the event was extremely popular and once again demonstrated the significant local interest in abolition. The success of the meeting was reported in several local newspapers, with the *Whig* declaring that "it was the largest meeting ever held" in the town.[73] In the meeting, the Church of Ireland Revd Thomas Drew acknowledged the town's long held anti-slavery views remarking that "The advocates of emancipation had no ordinary claim on the attention and sympathies of the people of Belfast…"[74] Belfast's abolitionists were long known for using emotive rhetoric to stir and agitate crowds and this meeting was no different with speakers – both international and local – using highly emotive stories of slaves and even including songs popular among freed slaves:

> All de money in de bank, not buy we
> All de money in de bank, not buy we.[75]

John Scoble reported on his visits to the colonies and the condition of the freed slaves. He recounted asking some freed slaves how abolition had affected them. One older woman answered him by standing up, bowing to him and stating: "When me slave, Massa, me bow down so; now me free, me stand upright'.[76] In other words, while once subservient, freed slaves in the colonies were now able to look their former 'tyrants' in the eye. The reaction to the reports by Scoble and the other visitors was overwhelmingly positive. At the beginning of the meeting Revd Drew had highlighted that the town had a long history of supporting the anti-slavery cause, and the support shown at the meeting demonstrated this was still the case.[77]

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[73] *Northern Whig*, October 31, 1840.
[74] Ibid., October 31, 1840.
[75] Ibid., October 31, 1840.
[76] *Belfast News-Letter*, November 3, 1840.
[77] While Drew made clear that Belfast had a significant number of anti-slavery supporters, the town was not always so innocent. In the past, several citizens had been involved in the trade. In 1786 Waddell Cunningham, a popular Presbyterian merchant in Belfast who sat on a number of local committees, called a meeting to propose the establishment of a slave-trading company within Belfast,

The following year the BASS published a pamphlet which made clear its negative assessment of the American slave system.[78] Written for the attention of the Christian Churches in America, the pamphlet remonstrated with their Christian brothers in allowing slavery to find "its more secure refuge in the Church". That the BASS felt the need to publicly criticise the American churches demonstrates the emotional hold that slavery had placed upon the town's abolitionists in this period. While upset in previous years at the treatment of slaves and apprentices in the British colonies, British abolitionists had been able to petition and appeal to their government in ending slavery. However, the American system was vastly different with Belfast's abolitionists allowed no official say on the treatment in the United States. As a result, they appealed to the churches to aid in abolition.

By the end of 1841, it was clear that the town's anti-slavery sentiment had remained akin to that seen in the 1830s. Support for the BASS was notable, as was the press's continued promotion of anti-slavery rhetoric. This support was common to the local Protestant press and to the recently established Catholic *Vindicator*. Despite an increase in religious discord, anti-slavery remained a cause célèbre with the conservative *News-Letter* going so far as to praise the nationalist MP Daniel O'Connell due to his vocal condemnation of slavery. [79] Clearly, (at least in this period) Belfast Catholics and Protestants shared the demand for full abolition within America, despite tensions related to Irish politics and growing sectarianism.

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which was subsequently denied. Cunningham had numerous connections to and profited from the slave trade. Cunningham, Valentine Jones and Robert Montgomery, all international importers and traders, were extremely important regarding the success of the town's new White Linen Hall. For more information see: Drennan Letters, D591/3, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland; Bill Rolston, 'Waddell Cunningham and Belfast's role in the slave trade, "A Lying Old Scoundrel"', *History Ireland*, 11.1 (Spring 2003): 24-27; Thomas M. Truxes, 'London's Irish Merchant Community and North Atlantic Commerce in the Mid-Eighteenth Century' in *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks in Europe and Overseas in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. by Jan Parmentier, Jane Ohlmeyer, and David Dickson (Gent: Academia Press, 2007), 285. For more information on the middles class in eighteenth century Belfast see: W. H. Crawford, 'The Belfast middles classes in the late 18th Century' in *The United Irishmen: republicanism, radicalism, and rebellion*, ed. by David Dickson, Dáire Keogh, Kevin Whelan (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993), 64-65.

[78] James Morgan, *To the Christian Churches of the United States, The Address of the Belfast Anti-Slavery Society*, (Belfast: H. McKendrick, 1841). Morgan was chairman of the BASS.

[79] *Belfast News-Letter*, May 29, 1838.

The Beginning of the End: the BASS

It was apparent from the eighteenth century that a belief in moral obligation and/or duty towards ending slavery was predominant among the town's liberals. However, while liberal newspapers including the *Whig* regularly published anti-slavery articles, conservative newspapers also regularly commented upon the evils of slavery and the treatment of slaves throughout the 1840s and 50s.[80] Yet, despite a range of Belfast's citizens and press maintaining their long-standing anti-slavery sentiment, the 1840s marked a period of significant turmoil for the town's official anti-slavery society. The turbulence revolved around disputes within the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and curiously, the disputes were not related to decreasing support for abolition. Instead, the society's downfall was to be the PCI's recent affiliation with the Scottish Free Church (the Free Kirk) – formed in 1843, due to the disruption of the Church of Scotland.[81]

Following its establishment in 1843, the Free Kirk was short on financial resources. It sought donations from churches worldwide, including those within the United States. However, some American donations came from pro-slavery churches. This led to a 'Send back the Money' controversy which brought divisions within the PCI and helped dismantle the BASS.[82] Historians such as Iain Whyte have observed that the Free Kirk suffered from serious obstacles in its initial years.[83] These included a lack of money, landlords refusing to lease land to erect churches and members of the Church threatened with eviction if they remained with the new denomination.[84] Due to the Church having suffered from its own form of persecution, critics asked how it could accept money from slave owners, who were

[80] *Belfast News-Letter*, October 23, 1840; November 3, 1840; October 9, 1846; January 6, 1846; January 8, 1846; February 7, 1851; June 27, 1856; September 11, 1856.
[81] For information on the Disruption of 1843 see: Alan Rodger, *Courts, the Church and the Constitution: Aspects of the Disruption of 1843:* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).
[82] Whyte, *'Send back the money!'*, 15-27.
[83] Ritchie, 'Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism', 58.
[84] Ibid., 58.

responsible for the persecution of others.[85] It is this criticism that would cause numerous complications and create tensions within both the PCI and the BASS.

The relationship between the PCI and the Free Kirk made the situation complex. Early in its establishment, the PCI had recognised the Free Kirk as a sister Church raising money for its support.[86] As a result, the PCI felt a moral obligation in supporting the sister Church – possibly due to the PCI's own history of persecution in the eighteenth century.[87] Following the Free Kirk's acceptance of donations from pro-slavery Churches, the PCI refused to abandon relations with the Scottish Free Church, despite the PCI's membership having long-established abolitionist sentiments. This inaction caused significant tensions among its ministry, congregations and the BASS. Due to the Free Kirk's actions, members of the BASS criticised the Church and its hypocrisy in accepting donations from pro-slavery organisations.[88] In September 1846 – during the inaugural gathering of the Evangelical Alliance – James Standfield (Anglican Secretary of the BASS) vehemently opposed anything that would imply fellowship with slaveholders.[89] Furthermore, criticism of the Free Kirk was also heard from some of the PCI's own clergy. Several abolitionist Presbyterian ministers, including the Revd Isaac Nelson, were supportive of the Free Kirk yet remained critical of the Free Kirk's leaders for their evasion surrounding the question of communion with slaveholders.[90] Despite such objections, it would be the criticism of the Free Kirk by the BASS's membership that would play a significant role in the society's demise as

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[85] S. J. Brown, 'Martyrdom in early Victorian Scotland: Disruption fathers and the making of the Free Church', in *Martyrs and Martyrologies: studies in church history Vol 30*, ed. by Diana Wood, (Oxford: Ecclesiastical History Society, 1993), 327-30.
[86] Stewart J. Brown, *The National Churches of England, Ireland and Scotland 1801-46*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 361.
[87] Brown, *The national churches*, 361.
[88] Journal of H. C. Wright, December 16, 1844, H. C. Wright MSS, MS.q.Am.1859.v.31, Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, US; *Letter of the Rev. Dr Chalmers, on American slave-holding; with remarks by the Belfast Anti-Slavery Committee*, (Belfast: J. Mullen, 1846), 5-6; Ritchie, 'Antislavery orthodoxy', 83.
[89] Daniel Ritchie, 'Abolitionism and evangelicalism: Isaac Nelson, the Evangelical Alliance, and the transatlantic debate over Christian fellowship with slaveholders', *Historical Journal*, 57, No. 2 (June 2014): 421-46.
[90] Presbyterian Revd Isaac Nelson was highly critical of the actions of the Kirk's leaders. See: T. Chalmers, *Letters of the Rev. Dr Chalmers*; Ritchie, 'Antislavery orthodoxy', 74-99.

Belfast's Presbyterians found it "difficult to reconcile support for the Free Church with zealous abolitionism."[91]

With the close relationship between the Free Kirk and the PCI, it became increasingly difficult for many within the PCI to maintain their membership of the BASS due to the criticism facing the sister Church.[92] Criticism of churches which accepted pro-slavery donations meant that division grew between those who were torn between Church and anti-slavery. Much of the criticism directed towards the Free Kirk came from a number of visiting American abolitionists in the 1840s. The sticking point for the PCI was that these visits were supported by the BASS leadership who generally agreed with the opinions of the American abolitionists.[93] The difficulty for Presbyterians in being supportive of both the Free Kirk and the BASS was seen in December 1844, when the Revd Henry Clarke Wright visited Belfast. Prior to one of his speeches Wright was cautioned by several PCI ministers "not to say anything about the Free Church of Scotland."[94] Instead, Wright asked the PCI to use its relationship with the Free Kirk to demand they not build a relationship with hypocrites who grasped "the Bible in one hand and the whip in the other."[95]

During Wright's visit a soirée was held in his honour at the Victoria Temperance Hotel, where several attendees agreed with Wright's stance that "Christian churches should not hold communion with slaveholders".[96] Yet, this event reflected the ongoing dilemma within the PCI, as James Standfield (secretary of the BASS) accused the Presbyterian Revd John Edgar of "backing out of his former position on slavery."[97] Edgar had long been an enthusiastic anti-slavery supporter who had supported the BASS's efforts in 1832 in only

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[91] Ritchie, 'Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism', 65.
[92] This was not true for all, as a small selection of zealots remained. For more information see: Ritchie, 'Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism', 56-118.
[93] In 1843, James Standfield urged Irish Presbyterians to exclude pro-slavery churchmen from their pulpits. Despite refraining from attacking the Free Kirk in 1844, by 1845 he allowed Douglass to publicly criticise the Free Kirk. See: Frederick Douglass, *The Frederick Douglass Papers: 1842-1852*, ed. by John R. McKivigan, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 78.
[94] Journal of H. C. Wright, December 17, 1844, H. C. Wright MSS, MS.q.Am.1859.v.31, Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, US.
[95] *Northern Whig*, January 16, 1845.
[96] Ibid., January 16, 1845. See: Ritchie, 'Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism', 66.
[97] Journal of H. C. Wright, January 16, 1845. H. C. Wright MSS, MS.q.Am.1859.v.31, Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, US.

nominating candidates' for MP who supported the abolition of slavery. That the society's secretary was now accusing him of abandoning his stance demonstrated that by this stage the town's "Presbyterians were finding it difficult to reconcile support for the Free Church with zealous abolitionism."[98]

The following year Frederick Douglass – a former slave and famed anti-slavery campaigner – visited Belfast. During his visit Douglass gave a speech at the Donegall Street Presbyterian Church in which he criticised the Free Kirk.[99] Douglass' criticism further increased antagonism within the PCI's orthodox ministry. While Douglass retained the support of some of the Presbyterian ministry such as Nelson, his criticism of the Free Kirk was condemned by others. In 1846, Mary Ireland – who had connections with female abolitionists in America – complained to American abolitionist Maria Weston Chapman about the behaviour of some of the PCI's members:

> …those who usually take the lead in other good works, offended by [the] uncompromising tone of Mr Douglass in regard to the Free Church of Scotland, are either avowed enemies to the present movement or very hollow friends.[100]

Days earlier, the *Whig* also levelled criticism at some of the town's Presbyterian ministry: "[we] regret to learn, that an anxiety exists, on the part of some Ministers of the General Assembly, to "throw cold water" upon the opposition to American slavery."[101] Amidst the internal tensions in the PCI regarding how to resolve the Free Kirk issue, and the criticism of some of the BASS's membership towards the sister Church, several Presbyterians choose to

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[98] Ritchie, 'Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism', 66.
[99] Frederick Douglass was a former slave and famed anti-slavery campaigner who visited Belfast several times between 1845-46. For more information on Douglass see: Laurence Fenton, *Frederick Douglass in Ireland: The 'Black O'Connell'*, (Cork: Collins Press, 2014); Christine Kinealy, *Frederick Douglass and Ireland: In His Own Words*, (London: Routledge, 2018).
[100] Mary Ireland to M. W. Chapman, January 24, 1846, Weston papers, Ms.A.9.2.v.22.p.14, Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, US.
[101] *Northern Whig*, January 8, 1846.

leave the BASS. These included George Troup, the editor of the *Banner*.[102] It became apparent that loyalty to church took precedence over commitment to the anti-slavery.

With criticism being directed towards the Free Kirk by a number of the town's Protestants – including some of the Presbyterian ministry – it is no surprise that the town's Catholic press also denounced the Free Kirk and churches that claimed Christianity while sharing communion with slave-owners. In December 1845, the *Vindicator* published an article regarding Douglass' lecture in Rosemary Street. The paper spoke of Douglass' "brilliant discourse" and was impressed with how he referenced those "ministers of religion" in America who "uphold the villainous traffic in human flesh".[103] The newspaper also commented on the hypocrisy of the Free Kirk's actions in accepting "blood money" from the Presbyterian Church of the United States: "[Douglas] contrasted her [Free Kirk's] conduct with that of O'Connell, who had never, on any occasion omitted to denounce slavery."[104] Much like the town's conservatives and liberals, who at times used anti-slavery as a political weapon, the *Vindicator* did similarly in promoting O'Connell's abolitionist efforts. In effect the newspaper aimed to strike a blow at the PCI by demonstrating that O'Connell – in regard to slavery – was beyond reproach, unlike the PCI's sister Church, the Free Kirk.[105]

Despite a falling membership criticism against the Free Kirk continued and in June 1846, Douglass was once again heard criticising the Free Kirk.[106] In late 1846, the visit of William Lloyd Garrison also increased disruption within both the PCI and the BASS due to his criticism of the Free Kirk and pro-slavery churches. This was not unusual, as Garrison was known to criticise American denominations and those abroad who accepted money from pro-slavery supporters.[107] Yet when Garrison's visit was approaching, both the *News-Letter*

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[102] Ritchie, 'Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism', 68.
[103] *Vindicator*, December 31, 1845.
[104] Ibid., December 31, 1845.
[105] The *Vindicator* made a number of references to Douglass during his stay. See: *Vindicator*, August 15, 1846; December 24, 1845; April 14, 1847.
[106] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, June 17, 1846; *Belfast News-Letter*, June 19, 1846.
[107] Garrison was not alone in his criticism. In December 1844, the American abolitionist Revd Henry Clarke Wright visited Belfast. Wright was a vocal critic of the churches in America believing them to be so enmeshed in slavery that he demanded that British churches shun association with American churches 'until the foul stain was wiped away'. Wright alleged that some "ministers spoke to me before I went into the Church tonight & cautioned me not to say anything about the Free Church of

and *Banner* cautioned the public about the famed abolitionist with the *News-Letter* criticising "his ceaseless enmity to the Orthodox Evangelical Churches in this country and America".[108]

During his visit, Garrison was both applauded and criticised for his comments against the Free Kirk, which inflamed tensions further. Soon even the BASS member and Presbyterian minister Isaac Nelson grew frustrated, due to Garrison labelling members of the Evangelical Alliance and the Free Church as "knaves and hypocrites".[109] As a result, Nelson asked that the BASS forbid such comments in the future.[110] However, despite members of the PCI demonstrating annoyance at Garrison and the BASS, their view was not shared amongst all Presbyterians. That October, the liberal Presbyterian newspaper the *Whig*, published an editorial giving a glowing account of Garrison's character and visit.[111]

It was becoming increasingly clear that the BASS was losing membership due to its support of criticism against the Free Kirk. Despite there being limited surviving primary source material relating to the BASS, and none which reference the numbers of Presbyterians who left the society due to the Free Kirk issue, there is no doubt that contemporaries believed criticism of the Free Kirk greatly contributed to a decline in membership of the BASS. In January 1846, George Troup admitted that he left the society due to it "casting the most unchristian aspersions upon some of the most pious and distinguished ministers of the present generation".[112] Additionally, the visits of Wright, Douglass and Garrison in the mid-1840s severely damaged the BASS's standing in the town. In 1849, Francis Calder (secretary of the BASS) claimed that following the visits some of the Presbyterian ministry refused to support the society.[113] Daniel Ritchie has observed that a

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Scotland". See: Journal of H. C. Wright, December 17, 1844; December 18, 1844, Wright papers, Ms.q.Am.1859.v.31, Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, US.; *Northern Whig*, December 19, 1844; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, December 18, 1844.

[108] *Belfast News-Letter*, October 2, 1846. Also see: *Banner of Ulster*, October 2, 1846.

[109] *Belfast News-Letter*, October 6, 1846; October 16, 1846. See: Ritchie, 'Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism', 85.

[110] Ritchie, 'Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism', 85.

[111] *Northern Whig*, October 6, 1846.

[112] *Banner of Ulster*, January 9, 1846.

[113] Francis Calder to Peter Bolton, April 9, 1849, B.F.A.S.S. papers, Mss.Brit.Emp.S.18.C24/122, Rhodes House, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University, Oxford, England.

number of the town's Presbyterians had left the BASS due to the tensions relating to criticism of the Free Kirk, and those that remained were ordered to say nothing against the Free Kirk.[114] Being barred from speaking against the Free Kirk, placed the town's Presbyterians in a difficult position, as how could they support anti-slavery without criticising the actions of the PCI's sister Church? Belfast held a significant importance in the Free Kirk debate, with visitors such as Frederick Douglass believing that Belfast was a fundamental part of the "send back the money campaign", due to it being the "hot bed of Presbyterianism and Free Churchism".[115] Furthermore, he believed that due to the long held anti-slavery sentiment and relationship with the Free Kirk "a blow [could] be struck here, more effectually than in any other part of Ireland".[116]

Fear in criticising the Free Church and not wanting to get involved in the dispute was seen in March 1846, when the abolitionist Revd James Morgan republished an anti-slavery pamphlet first issued in 1841. While the original pamphlet had been authorised by the BASS, the 1846 version did not reference the society.[117] As a result, the BASS's committee asked Morgan to comment on the Free Kirk's acceptance of pro-slavery donations, due to there being no reference in the republished pamphlet on the prominent issue.[118] Yet, despite his abolitionist background and his continued support of abolition with him republishing anti-slavery material, Morgan distanced himself from the society. This demonstrated that while anti-slavery support continued, the criticism of the Free Kirk by the BASS was causing a significant split within the society.

While comments by the BASS leadership caused significant issues there is little doubt that Douglass and Garrison's visits also contributed to the lack of Presbyterian support

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[114] Ritchie, 'Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism', 97. Also see: Nelson, *Evangelical Alliance. Letter from the Rev. Isaac Nelson, of Belfast, member of the Alliance, to the "Belfast Newsletter" in reply to a correspondent*, (Manchester: J. Gadsby, 1846), 2.
[115] Frederick Douglass to R. D. Webb, December 6, 1845, Douglass papers, Ms.A.1.2.v.15, p.86, Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, US.
[116] Ibid.
[117] *Northern Whig*, March 17, 1846. Original was James Morgan [chairman of the BASS], *To the Christian Churches of the United States: The address of the Belfast Anti-Slavery Society*, (Belfast: H. McKendrick, 1841).
[118] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, March 25, 1846.

for the BASS.[119] Daniel Ritchie has observed that the constant attacks on the Free Kirk led to a further decline in the BASS's membership, as many within the PCI ministry withdrew their support.[120] The rift between the BASS and the PCI was never fully repaired following the criticism in the 1840s with Francis Calder still displaying resentment over the lack of support from the PCI in 1849.[121] That year a meeting was held which was attended by John Scoble (secretary of the BFASS), and at which the BASS hoped to attract a significant attendance. However, the attendance was poor, and Calder maintained that it was due to enduring animosity due to the earlier criticism of the Free Church. As a result, Calder exaggeratedly complained that except for Isaac Nelson "not one of the Presbyterian Ministers connected with the Irish General Assembly were present consequently they must be considered even now as the staunch friends of the notorious Dr Cunningham and Candlish of the Free (Semi slave) Church of Scotland".[122]

It can be argued that the poor turnout for the 1849 meeting was indeed due to lingering anger at the treatment of the Free Kirk, as the PCI – despite having many members leave the BASS – continued to support abolition outside of the official society. Ritchie has demonstrated how in the 1840s the General Assembly "urged the Americans to labour for emancipation".[123] Additionally, in 1845 the General Assembly of Presbyterian Church of the United States addressed a letter to the PCI in which it criticised the "vehemence and fanatical intolerance" of Belfast's abolitionists.[124] In its response to the American Church's letter, the PCI made very clear that it disagreed with slavery and supported the anti-slavery portion of the American church's clergy.[125]

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[119] Riach, 'Ireland and the campaign against American slavery', 311.
[120] Ritchie, 'Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism', 86.
[121] Francis Calder to Peter Bolton, April 9, 1849, B.F.A.S.S. papers, Mss.Brit.Emp.S.18.C24/122, Rhodes House, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University, Oxford, England.
[122] William Cunningham and Robert S. Candlish was two of the Free Kirk's leaders. Francis Calder to Peter Bolton, April 9, 1849, B.F.A.S.S. papers, Mss.Brit.Emp.S.18.C24/122, Rhodes House, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University, Oxford, England.
[123] *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland,* Vol I, (Belfast: Published by order of the General Assembly, 1844), 347-8. Despite animosity due to the Free Kirk, James Standfield lauded the PCI for taking such a stand. See: *Banner of Ulster,* October 4, 1844.
[124] *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. With an appendix. A.D. 1845,* (Philadelphia: William S. Martien,1845), 45-6.
[125] See: Ritchie, 'Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism', 88-94.

Clearly, criticism of the Free Kirk negatively affected the town's official anti-slavery society.[126] Yet, while there is little doubt that the issues between the Free Kirk and the BASS were the main culprit, other events also saw a decline in the town's anti-slavery agitation. One of the most significant would be the great famine, whose impact was first seen in Belfast in 1847. A number of those who would have been significant supporters of anti-slavery in this period, needed to dedicate themselves to the disaster that was facing Ireland. As a result, attention had to be placed on those at home, with anti-slavery agitation secondary. Evidence of this was seen in 1847:

> The Committee of the Belfast Ladies Anti-Slavery Association beg to remind the public, that, in consequence of the appalling distress with which it has pleased Almighty God to visit this country, they have not applied to the Friends of Abolition for their annual subscriptions, nor solicited aid to the cause in any other way; they would, therefore, respectfully suggest, that, as an opportunity now offers, by which persons have it in their power *at the same time* to assist their suffering *Fellow-Countrymen and the Slave*, all those who wish to contribute their mite towards these truly noble objects, should attend the BAZAAR to be opened on April 5th (EASTER MONDAY), in the COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS, and there purchase some article of work, to be handed over to the Secretaries of the Anti-Slavery Association, who will most thankfully receive it, and engage that it shall be carefully forwarded to America, in time for the Anti-Slavery Bazaars held there.[127]

It is apparent that in this period, there was a dip in the town's overall anti-slavery agitation not only in support for the official BASS. With the influence of the famine and residual

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[126] The BASS were not the only group in Ireland to be split or torn apart by anti-slavery politics. The Young Irelanders also saw divisions because a selection of the members believed they should not accept donations from American pro-slavery supporters. Others disagreed, believing that the Irish should focus on their own problems and not get caught up in outside issues. See: Kinealy*, O'Connell and the Anti-Slavery Movement*, 137.

[127] *Northern Whig*, March 30, 1847.

anger at the treatment of the Free Kirk, there is no surprise that there was decreased turnouts for anti-slavery meetings in the late 1840s and early 1850s.

By the early 1850s, the worst of the famine was over, and anti-slavery views were once again in evidence in the local press, including in the Presbyterian *Banner*.[128] Yet, the official society never fully recovered from the loss of support which took place in the 1840s. In 1853, the BASS closed its doors for the final time with the two secretaries James Standfield and Francis Calder resigning when they were not able to find replacements.[129] The long-term impact of the damaged relationship between the PCI and the BASS was believed by Calder to be behind the demise of the society, due to the pressures of the relationship between the PCI and the Free Kirk, with the PCI refusing to allow any criticism of the sister Church.[130] Yet, the withdrawal of Presbyterian support for the BASS was in no way due to a decline in abolitionism, but was instead due to the difficult position members of the Church found themselves in due to the PCI's relationship with the Free Kirk. The Church's refusal to allow criticism of the sister Church, alongside the BASS's militant abolitionists and their approval in allowing foreign abolitionists to criticise the Free Kirk, led to a split between the society and Church. As a result, Belfast lost its 'official' anti-slavery society. Abolitionism as a movement reverted to its pre-1830 situation.

Abolitionism during the Famine

For many years, historians believed that Ulster had escaped lightly from the ravages of the famine, yet recent research has demonstrated that this was not the case.[131] By late 1846 the famine had caused significant distress in Belfast, intensified by a slump in the local textile

[128] *Banner of Ulster*, May 31, 1850; November 15, 1850; December 3, 1850; February 7, 1851; August 1, 1851; August 31, 1851; October 31, 1851; December 19, 1851; February 8, 1853; February 18, 1853; March 4, 1853
[129] Ellen M. Oldham, 'Irish Support of the Abolitionist Movement', *Boston Public Library Quarterly*, Vol. X, (October 1958): 175-87 (p. 183-4).
[130] Francis Calder to Louis Chamerovzow, September 26, 1853, B.F.A.S.S. papers, Mss.Brit.Emp.S.18.C29/20, Rhodes House, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University, Oxford, England; *Banner of Ulster*, November 8, 1855.
[131] Kinealy and Mac Atasney, *Hidden Famine*, 1.

industry, and by the end of 1846 the workhouse was full. By 1847, local soup kitchens were feeding over 3,000 people daily.[132] As a result, it would be reasonable to assume that local citizens and its press would be focusing on the nightmare events at home rather than those much further afield. However, this was not the case. During his visits in 1845-46, Frederick Douglass had made a lasting impression upon Belfast's women. So much so that it led to the formation of the Belfast Ladies' Anti-Slavery Association (hereafter, BLASA).[133] The women involved were well regarded reformists including Mary Ann McCracken, one of the last remaining liberal stalwarts of the 1790s.[134] In September 1846, when the impact of the famine was first being felt in Belfast, abolitionist propaganda was still in circulation, for example in an address published by the BLASA.[135] This address sought to head off potential criticism for seeking abolition of slavery in America while a famine was raging in Ireland:

> It may be asked, why bring forward the subject of American Slavery just now, when the claims of a famishing peasantry are so pressing? We reply,—The immediate object of our Association is not so much to obtain pecuniary aid, as to excite an intelligent acquaintance with the position of the coloured inhabitants of America, and, also, to induce kind-hearted ladies, by a little exercise of industry and ingenuity, to send to America a collection of needle-work, and other fancy articles, in aid of the devoted and self-sacrificing abolitionists…[136]

Several articles in the Belfast press covered BLASA fund raising events. Abolition remained a popular cause, despite the famine. The BLASA was aware fund raising would be hit by the

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[132] Kinealy and Mac Atasney, *Hidden Famine*, 5.
[133]The BLASA was founded in 1846 following a visit to Belfast by Frederick Douglass.
[134] Mary Ann McCracken was the sister of Henry Joy McCracken, executed in 1798 for his role in the 1798 rebellion. The family were well known liberals and their maternal grandfather, Henry Joy was the founder and proprietor of the *Belfast News-Letter*. See: Edna C. Fitzhenry, *Henry Joy McCracken*, (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1936); McNeil, *Mary Ann McCracken*.
[135] Belfast Ladies' Anti-Slavery Association, *Address from the committee of the Belfast ladies' anti-slavery association to the ladies of Ulster*, (Belfast: np., September 23, 1846).
[136] Ibid.

famine, but it continued to raise what it could to aid "Fellow-Countrymen and the Slave".[137] The association not only attempted to drum up donations to send abroad. It was also determined to educate the Irish citizens on the abuse that slaves faced. This 'education' in slavery was considered essential given the large Irish emigration to the United States. It was felt that would-be emigrants should understand and support abolition before departing:

> We feel especially anxious, that emigrants to America should be prepared, by a thorough acquaintance with the true nature of this question, to withstand the corrupting exhalations from the Slave States that have filled even the Northern with prejudices against the Negro and his abolition friends. Let us, if possible, enlist in this righteous cause the sympathies of childhood as well as age, of the poor as well as the rich, and not relax our efforts,
>
> Until IMMORTAL MIND,
>
> Unshackled, walks abroad,
>
> And chains no longer bind
>
> The image of our God.
>
> Until no captive one
>
> Murmurs on land or wave;
>
> And in his course, the sun
>
> Looks down upon no slave.—Whittier.[138]

Alongside the campaign to educate the Irish about American slavery,[139] local Catholic and Presbyterian newspapers upheld their long-standing views using the same anti-

[137] *Northern Whig*, March 30, 1847.
[138] Belfast Ladies' Anti-Slavery Association, *Address from the committee*. During the 1840s, over two million Irish emigrants arrived in the United States. They were in search of work, religious freedom, better economic conditions and after 1845 largely to escape the famine. See: Rayna Bailey, *Immigration and Migration*, (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010), 30.
[139] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, January 2, 1847; *Vindicator*, January 1, 1846; June 23, 1847; *Northern Whig*, January 17, 1846; June 18, 1846.

slavery tools and rhetoric seen in Belfast for over 80 years – namely emotive stories relating to liberty and God. In January 1847, amidst the horror of the famine, the *Vindicator* published several emotive articles criticising slavery. One article related to a story of a captured slave who attempted to escape to Canada from Maryland. The slave had been recaptured in Vermont by his master, whereby local abolitionists took the matter to court to demand they see the warrant the master had obtained to capture the man:

> Three judges were on the bench…one aged and feeble…his eyes being dim and his strength abated. The lawyer for the slave-holder rose…and said he should move the offender was guilty of the breach of the laws…he was a slave and had stolen himself. The other lawyer then said he should require proof that he was a *slave*. The slave-owner then stood up and held forth a document; this, he said, is a bill of sale…signed by his original owner. Then the old judge rose to his feet, and with a voice of thunder…demanded "who signed it, sir?" "John Williams" replied the astonished owner. "Take it away! take it away!" said the old man… "it is not valid, sir; it is falsely signed, sir; it is a blasphemous forgery; none can sign that *bill of sale* but God Almighty".[140]

Articles which detailed the humanity of slaves were common. In 1847, the *Ulster General Advertiser* published an article which attacked the system in America and described to its readers the horrors facing slaves there. One particular story described how a sixteen-year-old female slave – who was only one-eighth black – was sold with her young baby in her arms. Her former master who was the baby's father, sat in the audience of the slave sale and watched her and the child sold.[141] The town's press had long published such stirring stories relating to the mistreatment of slaves, in order to inflame readers' sense of injustice and humanity.

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[140] *Vindicator*, January 13, 1847.
[141] *Ulster General Advertiser, January* 16, 1847.

Within the PCI anti-slavery support also remained apparent, despite the disconnect between the BASS and the Church. The PCI's continued anti-slavery sentiment was seen in 1849, when a deputation from the PCI visited the United States. Prior to the visit the deputation had received instructions from the General Synod not to visit slave states nor accept any donations from slaveholders. That the PCI took such a step demonstrates the complicated position the Church found itself in, in that they were still significantly supportive of abolition yet were not able to openly criticise nor tolerate any criticism of the Free Kirk.[142] The PCI, much like the rest of the town, had largely reverted to the tactics used prior to 1830, as its members felt unable to support the BASS due to the society's criticism of its sister Church – the Free Kirk.

It is apparent that during the 1840s and 50s, anti-slavery remained a cause célèbre within Belfast. Despite the decline in Presbyterian support for the BASS, emotive anti-slavery articles remained prominent within the town's press, including the Presbyterian *Banner*. Financial aid for the cause fell due to the famine's impact but attempts to seek help or donations to aid those at home and the slaves abroad continued.[143] The establishment of the BLASA and its aim to educate Irish emigrants – fleeing the famine to the United States – of slavery, demonstrates that Belfast anti-slavery remained active even in the midst of the famine. In 1850, anti-slavery agitation grew further in response to the passage of the US Fugitive Slave Act.

Impact of the Fugitive Slave Act

In 1850, Belfast abolitionist sensitivities were further inflamed by the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act (hereafter, FSA) in the United States. This demonstrates the extent to which the condition of slavery in the Americas was monitored in Belfast. The visit of American abolitionists and former slaves in the 1840s and 50s to Belfast cemented

[142] *Banner of Ulster*, April 10, 1849. For more information on the deputation see: *Belfast News-Letter*, July 6, 1849.
[143] We know that financial aid fell due to the appeals in the Belfast press, with the society asking for donations of items instead. However, it is not known by how much.

transatlantic personal and political abolitionist ties, for instance between Maria Webb and Frederick Douglass.[144] The FSA caused outrage within Belfast, as it allowed for escaped slaves to be captured and returned to their masters, even if they were seized in free states.[145] There existed a theme of disgust due to the Act being an affront to long held beliefs in Belfast concerning liberty and natural rights. This disgust was seen in articles relating to slave catchers/agents.[146] An example of this was seen in June 1851, when the *News-Letter* published an article which detailed the treatment of a slave agent in Chicago:

> Great excitement had been produced in Chicago by the arrest of a Canadian who was alleged to be a slave agent …the agent for the owner narrowly escaped chastisement from the crowds. He was (met) with hisses and groans, and pelted with stones.[147]

A flurry of articles on captured slaves and slave agents regularly appeared in the local press.[148] Sympathy was expressed for the slaves, and anger and disgust directed towards the Act, slave owners and slave agents. The *Vindicator,* for example, described slavery as a "blot on America."[149]

Belfast abolitionists were interested in what action could be taken to circumvent the FSA, including the option of legal challenges through US courts. In December 1852, for example, an article in the *Whig* centred on the laws affecting slaves within the Act and also New York state.[150] It narrated the intended travel of a slave owner and his eight slaves through New York and onto the slave state of Texas. While in New York, a local abolitionist

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[144] A Quaker and the BLASA's corresponding secretary, Webb struck up a firm friendship with Douglass during his stay in Ireland. See: Christine Kinealy, *Charity and the Great Hunger*, 147.
[145] *Northern Whig*, November 21, 1850; *Belfast News-Letter*, December 27, 1850: *Belfast News-Letter*, June 25, 1851; *Banner of Ulster*, January 24, 1851; *Northern Whig*, January 28, 1851. For more information on the Fugitive Slave Act see: Stanley W. Campbell, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).
[146] *Belfast News-Letter*, June 25, 1851; May 5, 1852; *Northern Whig*, August 16, 1851; December 4, 1852; *Belfast Mercury*, January 26, 1853; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, August 13, 1853.
[147] *Belfast News-Letter*, June 25, 1851.
[148] See: Appendix 1.
[149] *Vindicator*, October 19, 1850. Also see: *Vindicator*, October 12, 1850; October 26, 1850.
[150] *Northern Whig*, December 4, 1852.

group, seeking to free the slaves, took the matter to court to fight the Fugitive Slave Act, and won.

Local newspapers and emigrant letters, from those in the United States to family at home, regularly discussed the mistreatment of slaves and Negroes and contained news of slavery bills and slave rebellions.[151] Features deriding American slavery were common:

> Burns, an escaped slave, at Boston, has been remanded back to his master…The streets, we learn, were lined with troops and commanded with cannon. And what was the flag? Surely not the star spangled [sic] banner: but the black flag, with Legree's skull and crossbones.[152]

In referencing "Legree" the *News-Letter* is speaking of the slave owner Simon Legree – a character in the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, first published in book form in 1852. The novel was extremely popular in the period and was often used by abolitionists to publicise the cause, demonstrating that Belfast's abolitionists were well versed in contemporary abolitionist material.

The employment of emotional, heart wrenching anecdotes (long used in the town's anti-slavery history) remained at the heart of the town's anti-slavery propaganda. In 1853, the *News-Letter*, for example, carried a letter which detailed the brutal treatment of slaves by their masters. The American author recounted a story that had been told to her by a southern female who had owned a young black female slave, given to her as a gift by her father on her wedding day:

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[151] *Belfast News-Letter*, June 25, 1855, January 1, 1857; *Northern Whig*, November 10, 1859; October 3, 1850.

[152] *Belfast News-Letter*, June 23, 1854. The reference to 'Legree' is speaking of the slave owner Simon Legree within the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* first published in book form in 1852. See: Harriet Beacher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 2 Vols, (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852).

> This girl she described as beautiful, 'tall and straight as an arrow,' with finely moulded form and delicate features, hair which fell to her waist in natural ringlets, and large soft eyes. The mistress was very proud of her little maid, but once during a short absence of the wife, the husband and master had, by whipping and threatening, compelled the girl, then ten years old, to become his paramour. For four years she kept the girl in her family, knowing the relations she sustained to her husband, and also knowing they were wholly involuntary on her part. She looked to her mistress for protection from her master's brutality, and according to that mistress's own account, she had endeavoured to protect her, but in vain…[153]

The letter went on to give details regarding the slave's sale when the mistress could no longer bear to look at her. The letter also included stories relating to other occasions where slaves were ill-treated and abused by their masters. For a town seeped in enlightenment ideals, such stories went against deeply held beliefs in liberty and natural rights.

Protestant and Catholic periodicals were committed to abolition. In the 1850s, two new Catholic newspapers were founded in Belfast – the nationalist *Ulsterman* in 1852 and the liberal *Belfast Morning News* in 1855. The *Morning News* regularly carried news relating to local anti-slavery lectures alongside articles regarding the sufferings of slaves.[154] The *Ulsterman*, while not as emotive as the *Morning News*, also featured abolitionist material. In February 1858, the *Ulsterman* reported an event involving the HMS Sappho (which occurred the previous year) when the ship managed to capture a full slave ship off the African coast of Loando:

> There was one poor creature, with an infant at her breast, naked, cold, and exhausted, apparently dying; a little wine was given her, then some rice, which she forced from her own, to her baby's mouth. A sheet was given to cover her; she wrapped her baby

[153] *Belfast News-Letter*, March 28, 1853.
[154] *Belfast Morning News*, December 18, 1857; March 5, 1858.

> in it and pressed it to her heart, with that look of maternal love which God has given to the dark as well as to the pale-face race…[155]

In the 1850s the Belfast press noted the division between the Northern and Southern states in the US around slavery, throwing its weight behind US abolitionism. In February 1857, for example, the *Mercury* commented negatively upon resolutions adopted in the slave state of Tennessee due to a number of recent insurrections.[156] The *Mercury* predicted:

> The curse of slavery will yet dismember the American Union. The North and South are now fairly pitted and however long the crisis of the battle may be in coming, come at last it assuredly will.[157]

The Tennessee resolutions were austere, placing further restrictions upon slaves. The *Mercury* noted: "Anything more diabolically cold blooded and atrocious…would be difficult to imagine…". The editor's concluding words were embedded in eighteenth-century enlightenment notions of liberty and natural rights:

> The policy of the slaveholder is to reduce the negro to the level of the brute, to make him a mere machine to do his work, a machine without a mind, or a soul or feeling akin to human…but it is against nature that such degradations can exist continually…It is impossible to shut out light from the human mind no matter how debased, when it is brought into contact with intelligence; and the slaveholder is forced to this, he is coerced to admit the slave to knowledge, to render him more useful and valuable…[158]

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[155] *Ulsterman*, February 8, 1858.
[156] *Belfast Mercury*, February 3, 1857.
[157] Ibid., February 3, 1857.
[158] Ibid., February 3, 1857.

The FSA and the position of slaves more broadly in America brought forth significant disquiet and protest in Belfast. Notions of liberty were clearly offended. The extent of coverage and the knowledge displayed of conditions in America is impressive, illustrating the importance of the Americas in the local psyche, and also a global abolitionist outlook. The tussle over slavery in America was followed closely in Belfast and served to harden and resolve local abolitionist sentiment and agitation.

Local Friends, Social Reform and Anti-Slavery

A previously overlooked aspect of Belfast's anti-slavery make-up is the contributions made by the town's Quakers. In the late eighteenth century, Belfast's Quakers were insular, avoiding broader political involvement in, for instance, the United Irish rebellion.[159] However by the early nineteenth century, younger Friends especially were engaging in social issues outside the Quakers.[160] In the 1820s, for example, Belfast Quakers gathered anti-slavery petitions to send to parliament and produced anti-slavery literature.[161] Furthermore, by the 1830s and 40s the town's small Quaker minority[162] were linking local and national campaigns.[163]

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[159] Newhouse, 'John Hancock Jnr, 1762-1823', 47. The failed rebellion went unmentioned in the Meeting House's minutes, bar one mention of a Friend who lost property. See: Minute Book, Lisburn Monthly Meeting, 1770-1813, (Men's and Women's), Strong Room, Lisburn Quaker Meeting House, Lisburn, Northern Ireland.

[160] Increased Quaker interest in anti-slavery was influenced in this period by visits from foreign Friends who inspired the new younger generation coming through. Stephen Grellet, originally from France, had emigrated to America during the French Revolution. A noted abolitionist, he visited Ulster in the early 1800s and brought with him visible anti-slavery agitation. For further information on Grellet see: William Wistar Comfort, *Stephen Grellet, 1773-1855*, (New York: Macmillan, 1942); Minute Book, Lisburn Monthly Meeting, 1770-1813, (Men's and Women's), Strong Room, Lisburn Quaker Meeting House, Lisburn, Northern Ireland.

[161] By the 1810s, Belfast's Quakers had begun to demonstrate an active interest in abolition, sending petitions to the British parliament demanding an end to slavery, and receiving the British abolitionist publication the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, from English Friends. See: Petition urging the Abolition of Negro Slavery, C. 1824, Goff Family Correspondence, D1762/50, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland. *Belfast News-Letter*, March 25, 1828; June 13, 1828.

[162] In 1815 there were forty members of the Belfast Meeting House. In 1868, there were 247 members of the Belfast Meeting House. See: Sandra King, *History of the Religious Society of Friends: Frederick Street, Belfast*, (Belfast: Sandra King. 1999), 5, 21.

[163] There is no doubt that Belfast's Quakers were influenced in the 1820s and 30s by Quaker involvement in the national campaign. However, due to Belfast's Quakers being active members in the town they also represented the town's anti-slavery sentiment, despite their connection to the larger Quaker network.

In 1837, the local Quaker, merchant, and member of the BASS William Bell founded a periodical titled the *Irish Friend*.[164] The *Friend* was the first Quaker newspaper within the British Isles. It would become widely read and influential.[165] Historically, British Quakers have long played a significant role in regard to social reform and philanthropy. The *Friend* reported on Belfast Quaker anti-slavery activity. The link between social issues, including abolition, and a Quaker's religious duty was strong, evident in the *Friend's* founding editorial:

> …we shall not shrink, where justice demands it, from the exposure of the prevailing inconsistencies of the present day; neither is it our intention to be confined *exclusively* to objects connected with Friends. We shall, therefore, devote a portion of our journal to information on the Abolition of Slavery, on Moral Reform, and on Temperance…[166]

A member of the BASS,[167] Bell was true to his word and immediately went on in the same edition to discuss a recent address made by the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society – founded in Dublin in 1837 and prolific in its support of abolition.[168] The *Friend* was profoundly critical of slavery in the United States and the British system of apprenticeship, stating that the latter

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[164] Bell's publication of the newspaper was inspired by the American Quaker newspaper *The Friend* – the first ever Quaker periodical and founded in Philadelphia in 1827. Webb was a member for the BASS and attended meetings during his time in Belfast. *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, November 4, 1837.

[165] In the first two years the *Irish Friend*'s average numbers of pages doubled. See: *Irish Friend*, Vol. 3, No. 10, 8. In February 1839 the periodical was registered as a newspaper, with the newspaper stamp of one penny impressed on every copy sold thereafter. The stamp greatly facilitated subscriptions of *The Irish Friend* at a distance and increased the reach of Belfast opinions regarding slavery. By October 1840, the *Friend* had a circulation of over 2000. This would mean that over half of all Quaker households in the British Isles were receiving the newspaper. See: Chapter four of John Stephenson Rowntree, *Quakerism, Past and Present: Being an Inquiry into the causes of its Decline in Great Britain and Ireland*, (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1859).

[166] *Irish Friend*, Vol. 1., No. 1., 1.

[167] Webb was a member for the BASS and attended meetings during his time in Belfast. *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, November 4, 1837. For more on the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society see: Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery*, 270-271.

[168] For more information on the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society see: Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery*, 270-271.

was "wantonly perverted, imposing upon the slaves, generally, a cruel mockery of freedom…"[169] As the newspaper gained in popularity, the attacks on slavery continued with frequent updates on anti-slavery delegations and meetings.[170] Like the Presbyterian and Catholic press, Belfast's Quakers used the literary forms of letters and poems to promote abolitionism. In January 1838, the newspaper published an original poem titled "Slavery":

> ERIN, my country! O'er the swelling wave
> Join in the cry, ask freedom for the slave –
> *Immediate* freedom; let no selfish clause,
> No cruel policy *increase* his woes.
> Long hath he suffered – long been known to weep,
> Whilst retributive justice seem'd to sleep;
> Roused at the call of Freedom, from her trance,
> She bids thy sons in her bright train advance,
> Their eloquence – O! may it, as the roar
> Of the loud thunder, vibrate to each shore
> Of this vast empire, e'vn till every heart,
> Fired with fresh ardour, in her cause take part,
> Queen of the Isles! Victoria, from thy throne
> Of regal splendour, hear thy people's groan,
> And say, shall woman plead with thee in vain
> For *woman*, bowed in slavery's galling chain?
> Never, *no never*! thy young heart shall fell
> The pure delight – the bliss – the *power* to heal.
> O, cast thine eyes o'er thine own favoured Isle,
> How many happy homes await thy smile –

[169] *Irish Friend*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 7.
[170] Ibid., Vol. 1, No. 2, 6.

Homes, where affections radiant sunbeams throw
Zest o'er our joys, and solace o'er our woe;
These, *these* are sacred, no fell tyrant dare
From the fond mother's grasp, her treasure tear –
No! *worse than savage*, bent on hateful strife
Rend from her husband's arms the shrieking wife!
It is not so beyond the boundless sea,
Where sunny islands own a Queen in thee,
How great the contrast! Hideous slavery there
Full fraught with horror reigns; and wild despair
Bends to the earth his victims. Hope wanes dim
Within the slave's sad heart. He feels for him
How faint a gleam of happiness is given,
His tyrant Lord points not the path to Heaven.
Then O, Victoria! Quickly o'er the wave
Speed forth they mandate, thine the power to save,
Thousands of hearts that throb with anguish now,
Shall call for blessings on thy youthful brow.
Belfast, 11th Mo., 1837.[171]

The poem, written by a Belfast citizen, was similar in tone and in language to the 1807 poem "The Abolition of the Slave Trade", published by the *News-Letter*.[172] Both poems appealed to the humanity of the reader and called for change, in 1807 for the abolition of the slave trade and in 1837 for the end of the apprenticeship system (therefore granting full freedom to the slaves). The 1837 poem demonstrated the inhumane treatment of the slaves and their anguish in being separated from their family by using emotive language to attract

[171] *Irish Friend*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 3.
[172] *Belfast News-Letter*, February 6, 1807.

the sympathy of the reader: "…From the fond mother's grasp, her treasure tear – No! *worse than savage*, bent on hateful strife".[173]

In April 1838, the *Friend* published another rousing abolitionist poem titled "The Sin of Slavery" which used the ten commandments as a construct to illustrate how slavery went against all Christian reasoning: "" Thou shalt not steal" … below Groans many a newly captured slave…"[174] The very title of the poem includes the word "Sin" demonstrating how local Quakers viewed the business of slavery itself.[175] In printing such emotive material, Bell and his supporters were similar to Belfast's other denominations that had published poetry and letters on the evils of the slave trade.

The *Friend* regularly reported on Friends' anti-slavery petitions addressed to the British parliament. The paper also urged more petitions to be sent by those who "understand the subject affix considerable importance to the number of petitions to parliament."[176] By the late 1830s, some abolitionists worried that Britain's anti-slavery sentiment had fallen into a "state of silent acquiescence" following the 1833 Abolition Act.[177] If such fears were true, it was not so in Belfast, as anti-slavery agitation in the town was still very active. The *Friend*'s significant circulation in Britain and its regular promotion of abolitionist speeches and publications furthered the cause and increased interest among Quakers further afield.[178]

Much like the *News-Letter*, which published letters written by American abolitionists, the *Friend* used contemporary first-hand testimony to illustrate the horrors of slavery. In July 1839, the paper published a letter written by an American citizen which detailed how he witnessed the distressing treatment of a dying slave by his slaveholder. In

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[173] *Irish Friend*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 3.
[174] Ibid., Vol, 1, No. 7, 8.
[175] Bell included a copy of John Wesley's letter to William Wilberforce shortly before Wesley's death in 1791. Wesley told Wilberforce to continue his work: "Go on in the name of God, and the power of his might, till even American Slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun, shall vanish away before it." See: *Irish Friend*, Vol. 1., No. 7, 8.
[176] Ibid., Vol. 1, No. 5, 6.
[177] Ibid., Vol. 2, No. 6, 1.
[178] Ibid., Vol. 3, No. 10, 1. In 1839, the circulation was at roughly 1,500 and rose to more than 2,000 by October 1840. According to statistics, this would mean more than half of all Quaker households in the British Isles were purchasing the newspaper. See: Bernard Canter, 'A Pioneer Quaker Newspaper: The Irish Friend, 1837-1842', (Unpublished manuscript: Private Collection, Newry, 1967), 30. Also see: Rowntree, *Quakerism past and present*, Chapter IV.

the slave's final minutes, he called to God: "Glory be to thee, Oh my God! Who art now taking my soul to Thyself, having redeemed it…".[179] While emotive stories were common in the town's anti-slavery propaganda, Belfast's Friends regularly used Christianity to appeal for support, much like the eighteenth century Presbyterian abolitionists.[180]

The *Friend* also addressed the issue of slavery in the United States, as a critic of both the practice there and the all-too-often inaction of Quakers in America. In 1840, the American Quaker newspaper the *Philadelphia Friend* responded, accusing the editor of being "disaffected towards the Society of Friends, and that it [the *Irish Friend*] is patronised by disaffected members and is not approved of by the Society in general of Great Britain."[181] Bell's response in the *Friend* addressed these accusations and argued that he and his readers were not alienated from the Society of Friends. Instead they were "disaffected from the portion of the Society [worldwide] that had departed from practice the simplicity and purity of life and conversation, which shone so conspicuously in our early Friends, and shines in the faithful of this day."[182] That Bell was willing to publicly criticise other Friends, demonstrates just how ardent the *Friend* was in spreading its abolitionist message.

By 1840, the *Friend* was in receipt of significant Quaker support throughout the British Isles.[183] Bell himself noted:

> From the establishment of the Irish Friend to the present time, we have made very little exertion to obtain subscribers to the work, or contributions to its columns, but have left it very much to find its own way. Notwithstanding our own unwillingness to push it into notice, active and zealous friends have been raised up in various quarters, who have largely contributed to the extent of its circulation…[184]

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[179] *Irish Friend*, Vol. 2, No. 7, 5.
[180] Samuel Barber Papers, PA36, Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, Belfast Northern Ireland; Madden, *The United Irishmen,* 303; Quinn, *A Soul on Fire,* 3.
[181] *Philadelphia Friend*, August 1, 1840.
[182] For more details on this criticism see: *Irish Friend*, Vol. 3, No. 11, 4-5.
[183] See: Canter, 'A Pioneer Quaker Newspaper'.
[184] *Irish Friend*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 4-5.

It was undoubtedly the case that Belfast's Quakers played a significant role in the British Quaker network, with Belfast being at the centre of Quaker journalism. The *Friend* frequently focused upon slavery and abolition much like the Presbyterian and Catholic newspapers of the time.[185] The *Friend* gave the Quakers a voice whose influence extended beyond their numbers.[186]

The Growth of Women's Abolitionism

In recent years there has been limited research on the formation of the Belfast Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society in 1846 and its activities.[187] The topic of women in Belfast abolitionism deserves much more detailed attention. During the 1840s women played a significant role in local abolitionism. They saw an educative function rooted in Christian morality. Their devotion to abolitionism was to be stretched during the Great Famine, but was nevertheless still apparent.

Prior to the 1840s, Belfast women were largely absent from abolitionism and had no separate organisation. However, women were not entirely absent. In 1814, for example, several local women, in the lead up to the Congress of Vienna, published an article that disparaged Lord Castlereagh's (the British Foreign Secretary) attempts to broker a deal regarding European slavery.[188] The article, published by the *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, was

[185] *Belfast News-Letter*, January 27, 1807; February 6, 1807; *Northern Whig*, October 3, 1850.
[186] Despite the popularity of the *Friend*, the newspaper ceased publication in 1842. This was not due to a decrease in sales, but rather issues relating to Bell's merchant business in Belfast. Due to money issues, William Bell emigrated with his family to the United States. After several years in New York and Cincinnati, they settled in Richmond, Virginia, where Bell died in 1871. See: *British Friend*, April 1871. Also, Canter, 'A Pioneer Quaker Newspaper'. For more information on the *Irish Friend* see: Appendix 2.
[187] Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, 126, 238; Kinealy, *Daniel O'Connell and the anti-slavery movement*, 135-6, 142, 143, 152; Kinealy, *Charity and the Great Hunger in Ireland*, 146-7; Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: 1612-1865*, 288.
[188] Many within Britain believed that slavery would play a significant role in the congress with many hoping other nations involved in the talks would declare an end to their slave trade – as Britain had done in 1807. The mass scale of the public interest and petitioning for the abolition of slavery led to the slave trade being placed on the conference agenda, with abolitionists hoping that the slave trade would be banned by the countries attending. However, while some progress was made – Portugal was paid compensation to end the trade – for many this did not go nearly far enough. For more

addressed to the women of Ireland and detailed how women, via influencing men, could play a vital role in abolition:

> Lord Castlereagh declares that he found it impossible to obtain peace without immolating these unoffending victims. Let us then enable him to say to France, "The British nation will not consent to this sacrifice. The people will not purchase with the blood of Africa that peace which they have earned with their own; with some of the purest, and some of the noblest blood that flowed in British veins." Where the voice of the nation is unanimous, it must prevail…imagine your own children torn from you by pirates for such a deplorable existence…[189]

Although women may have been largely invisible, the above article demonstrates their involvement in the politics of abolitionism.

In 1838, several unknown Belfast women engaged in abolitionist poetry propaganda. The poem, "Appeal to the Ladies of Ireland", was highly emotive in describing the abuses against slaves and appealed to a woman's love of family:

> We dreamt we saw her fetters breaking,
> We called our Negro sister – free!
> But, from our pleasant slumber waking,
> We find her still in slavery;
> And prisons, bonds, and scourges, still
> Await her, at her tyrant's will.
>
> Our nation's wealth, so freely given,

information regarding the Congress of Vienna and slavery see: Reich, 'The Slave Trade at the conference of Vienna…'; Jarrett, *The Congress of Vienna*; Fladeland, "Abolitionist Pressures".

[189] *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, July 31, 1814.

Has purchased but our nation's shame;
And misery, that sounds to Heaven,
Is taunted with an empty name;
And can we sit unheeding by,
Nor pity when our sister's cry?

No! While our British hearts are swelling
With joys no slave can ever know;
And while our British tongues are telling
The birth-right blessings we can shew [sic]
Then let those hearts and tongues unite,
To seek our injured sister's right.

Lift, like a trumpet, lift your voices,
Ye wives and mothers of our isle,
Till every Negro wife rejoices,
And every mother learns to smile,
And feels *that* feeling – now unknown –
Her child, her husband, are her own!

No passing dream, no empty vision,
Again must o'er our senses creep,
Till we have burst our sister's prison;
And lay her fetters in the deep,
And every son of Afric [sic] be
That which his God has made him – free!

Women of Erin! –Let us never

> The cry for liberty give o'er,
> Till slavery sinks, and sinks for ever,
> And man shall wear a chain no more –
> Save one, whose lasting link shall bind,
> In bonds of love, all human kind.[190]

The poem appealed to local women's love of family: "And feels *that* feeling – now unknown – Her child, her husband, are her own!". The idea that a woman's children and husband could belong to others would have been unimaginable and horrific. Emotive language highlighted why women felt a particular sense of sorrow and bore particular responsibility for aiding the slave:

> Women were the keepers of tradition, the exemplars of morality as traditionally defined, the disinfecting element in a morally dissolute society. The Irish national character [Erin] was represented as feminine…Home was seen as an oasis of selflessness, self-denial, community, indeed as virtue as traditionally understood. Women, as guardians and transmitters of tradition and morality, were held to be naturally moral and self-sacrificing.[191]

Whilst women were considered the heart, or moral centre, of the family home, the subject of women's rights began to be discussed alongside slavery.[192] This issue came to national attention when at the BFASS convention in 1840, female representatives from the

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[190] *Northern Whig*, March 20, 1838.
[191] Timothy P. Foley, 'Public Sphere and Domestic Circle: Gender and Political Economy in Nineteenth Century Ireland', in *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres,* ed. by Margaret Kelleher and James H. Murphy, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997), 23-24.
[192] For further information see, in chronological order: Midgley, *Women Against Slavery,* 158-162; Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Brewer Stewart eds., *Women's Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Carol Faulkner, *Lucretia Mott's Heresy: Abolition and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

United States were barred from both speaking and taking their seats – making headlines in Britain, America and Ireland.[193] During this period many 'official' anti-slavery societies such as the BFASS did not allow women to join as members.[194] The input of women in the national campaign was additionally affected following the 1840 BFASS Convention, which saw the national society – by refusing to accept female delegates – align itself with the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society rather than the Garrisonian American Anti-Slavery Society. As a result, there were limits to women's influence in the national campaign. Due to the BASS being an auxiliary to the BFASS, women could not join the local official society. However, these views were not shared everywhere. In Belfast, the *Irish Friend* disagreed with the BFASS's stance at the 1840 Convention, observing that while the Convention was succeeding in breaking down barriers, the treatment of female delegates was a significant drawback: "Tis true there is some drawback…the decision of the assembly not to allow the female delegates from America to sit in the convention…"[195]

Criticism regarding the treatment of the female American delegates, was not unusual for the *Friend*. The newspaper was extremely liberal in its support for female education – as many British Quakers were in this period.[196] This was also not the first time that the *Friend* had spoken out regarding women and equality. In the introductory address of the first edition the editor had demonstrated that Quakers were very modern (for this period) regarding their views of women and education, stating that there should be no reason why female education should differ "in its essentials" from that of males as education is good for overall human nature.[197] The *Friend* even went so far as to publish that women "are a part – and they ought to be in a much greater degree than they are, a part – of the effective contributors to the

[193] The issues arose from the division recently seen in the American anti-slavery movement. Disaffected members of the American Anti-Slavery Society (headed by Garrison) had seceded to form the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Party. The issues which caused the split centred on Garrisonians combining anti-slavery with other radical causes including women's rights and this dispute filtered over into the 1840 convention. See: Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, 121. Also, Lydia Murdoch, *Daily Life of Victorian Women*, (California: Greenwood Press, 2014), 239.
[194] Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, 15, 123-124.
[195] *Irish Friend*, Vol. 3, No. 8, 7.
[196] See: Thomas Clarkson, *A Portraiture of Quakerism*, 3 vols, (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1806), vol. III, ch. 18.
[197] *Irish Friend*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1.

welfare and intelligence of the human family."[198] With this viewpoint, it is no surprise that female Friends were highly involved in Belfast philanthropy in nineteenth century Belfast, with William Bell's wife an active member of the Women's Belfast Poor House Committee.[199]

Although female support for abolition was relatively inconspicuous and intermittent before the mid-1840s, by 1846 the town's women had found their voice. Inspired by Frederick Douglass' visits between 1845-46, several of the town's middle-class ladies established the BLASA in 1846. Maria Webb, a Quaker and the association's corresponding secretary, struck up a firm friendship with Douglass during his stay in Ireland.[200] Their friendship would be further strengthened with numerous letters over the following decades.

Following the establishment of the BLASA, its members wasted no time in asking for donations to aid the anti-slavery movement, nor discussing the horrors of slavery. In September 1846, the association published an address which detailed their hopes for the abolition of slavery.[201] They appealed for more women to join, in language similar to the old late eighteenth and early nineteenth century anti-slavery rhetoric: "…in the cause of the slave, may we not venture to hope for some success, by carrying this subject into our families, and interesting the child, from infancy, in the wrongs of the Negro?" That there was such a connection to the old ideology is not surprising, as the association had strong connections to the eighteenth-century ideology. Mary Ann McCracken – sister to United Irishman Henry Joy McCracken and friend to many of those involved in the Society – was an ardent member of the BLASA despite her advanced age and retained her egalitarian ideals.

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[198] *Irish Friend*, Vol. 1., No. 1, 1.
[199] Women's Meeting Minute Books, March 13, 1827, Clifton House Records, Clifton Poor House, Belfast. Other members included Mary Ann McCracken and Isabell Tennent. Both members of established liberal families within the town.
[200] Kinealy, *Charity and the Great Hunger in* Ireland, 147. Maria Webb had familial connections to prominent anti-slavery campaigners. Through her marriage to William Webb, she was a cousin of Richard Davis Webb, a founder and the Secretary of the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society in Dublin. It was considered one of the most prominent anti-slavery societies in Europe and one of the most ardent.
[201] Belfast Ladies' Anti-Slavery Association, *Address from the committee*.

The BLASA address refused to take sides engage in the politics surrounding the split within the American Anti-Slavery Society,[202] making clear they would donate to whichever societies their contributors desired. The BLASA did not wish to dissipate its energies by becoming embroiled in controversies in other societies. The BLASA saw itself as having an important educative function that issued from women being "…the keepers of tradition, the exemplars of morality as traditionally defined, [and] the disinfecting element in a morally dissolute society…"[203] A letter from Mary Ireland – a member of the BLASA – to the Massachusetts American Ladies Anti-Slavery Society provides further evidence of their perceived responsibility to educate others on slavery:

> If the sons and daughters of Erin ere they leave their own sea-girt isle were intellectually prepared to sympathise with the enslaved and injured coloured inhabitants of your land, what a different influence might the emigrants carry with them to the homes and circles they form in America.[204]

During the 1840s the town's press regularly covered the BLASA's agitation, adding its support for the women's actions: "Altogether the [anti-slavery] exhibition was most creditable to the fair friends of freedom with whom it originated, and whose hands furnished such a splendid practical proof of their sincerity."[205] In 1847, when the effects of the famine began to be felt in Belfast, the BLASA accepted that subscriptions would be infrequent.[206] As many of the women who were members of the BLASA were also members of the Belfast

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[202] The split occurred due to disagreements over how Garrison used the anti-slavery platform within the American Anti-Slavery Society for other causes, including women's rights. This would cause a split and lead to the establishment of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. See: James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 241; Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008).
[203] Foley, 'Public Sphere and Domestic Circle', 23-24.
[204] Mary Ireland, to Secretary of Mass. Female ASS, June 17, 1846, quoted in Oldham, 'Irish Support of the Abolitionist Movement', 182. Also see: Kinealy, *O'Connell and the Anti-Slavery Movement*, 135-6.
[205] *Northern Whig*, October 29, 1846; October 27, 1846; *Banner of Ulster*, April 2, 1847.; *Ulster General Advertiser*, September 25, 1847.
[206] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, March 29, 1847.

Ladies' Association for the Relief of Irish Destitution – which worked tirelessly in support of those suffering the effects of the famine – more time and effort had to be directed towards the victims of the famine rather than local anti-slavery agitation.[207] Anti-slavery support was still visible however, as while famine relief remained the most pressing concern, abolitionist support continued with members sending what they could to American Societies.[208] The needs of the famine naturally outweighed collections for anti-slavery.

Due to the significant emotional impact of the famine, apathy soon appeared within the Belfast Ladies' Association and the BLASA, due to the Ladies' Association having to end most of its activities in the late 1840s – a result of the lack of financial aid given by the British government. Despite the BLASA being founded with pure anti-slavery ideals, with several members remaining committed to abolition throughout their lifetimes – including Maria Webb and Mary Ann McCracken – the association suffered due to it being a victim of circumstance. Its establishment in 1846, was influenced by the recent visits of prominent abolitionists, however its timing – when the famine was beginning to intensify and spread – meant that its members needed to devote themselves to the humanitarian disaster at home.

The BLASA's close ties with the Ladies' Association saw its members struggle to aid those in need during the famine, and this led to a decline in female anti-slavery agitation in the early 1850s. This effect was also seen outside Belfast as Richard Webb – founder of Dublin's Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society – reported in 1849 that "All that goes in the Dublin box is contributed by the very few persons and the number of our helpers is not increased but diminished from year to year".[209] The Cork societies also lamented the impact of the famine on their collections reporting "the famine years have exercised a very depressing

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[207] The Belfast Ladies' Association for the Relief of Irish Destitution was founded in January 1847, with the first meeting described as "a large and influential assemblage of Ladies of all religious denominations". See: *Vindicator*, January 13, 1847; Kinealy, *Charity and the Great Hunger*, 146. Also see: *First Report of Belfast Ladies' Committee*, March 6, 1847, (Belfast: n.p., 1847), 1.
[208] Maria Webb to Secretary of Boston, 14 November 1848, seen in Oldham, 'Irish Support of the Abolitionist Movement', 182.
[209] Richard Webb, to Anne Weston, July 5, 1849, seen in Clare Taylor, *British and American Abolitionists: an episode in transatlantic understanding*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1974), 337.

influence, and tho' the country is now as well off as before 1846, still that amount of prosperity is not enough to allow us to send money to America".[210]

The short period of time between the establishment of the BLASA and the impact of the famine on Belfast, meant that the association struggled to generate much of an impact before its members were needed to provide humanitarian aid. As a result, there were strict limits to the influence and resources that the society had.[211] While the official society (the BASS) was destroyed by politics relating to the PCI's relationship with the Free Kirk, the BLASA had very little time to generate momentum prior to the famine. The growth of apathy for official societies – greatly impacted by the emotional after effects of the famine – also played its part, with the town's anti-slavery sentiment moving away from official societal support to the earlier unofficial sentiment seen prior to 1830.[212]

The connection between Temperance and Abolition

During the visits by foreign abolitionists in the 1840s, temperance was linked with abolitionism. Support for temperance arose in the 1830s, when soirées were organised by Belfast's temperance and teetotal societies.[213] Temperance became connected to anti-slavery because advocates of temperance believed alcohol led men to sin.[214] A notable sin was to enslave others. In this way temperance became interwoven with the town's abolitionist activity. Temperance advocates regularly used slave rhetoric to strengthen support for the cause and highlight man's addiction (or enslavement) to alcohol. This connection held in the period 1830-1860.

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[210] Isabel Jennings to Mary Estlin, March 24, 1851, seen in Oldham, 'Irish Support of the Abolitionist Movement', 183.

[211] Despite the significant relief the Ladies' Association had provided, when they asked for finance from the government to continue, they were refused. See: Trevelyan to Ladies' Relief Associations in Ireland, October 10, 1847, HO 45 1942, Public Record Office London.

[212] The departure of Mary Webb and her family to Dublin in 1848, was also a blow to the BLASA.

[213] Hirst, *Religion, Politics and Violence*, 41-42.

[214] *Monitor, and Missionary Chronicle, of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, March 1, 1854; *Belfast News-Letter*, July 1, 1856; May 5, 1857; July 10, 1857; *Banner of Ulster*, February 17, 1857; *Weekly Vindicator*, November 4, 1848; November 18, 1848. In 1857, an article in the *News-Letter* further highlighted the link that a growing sector in the town saw between temperance and sin: "That a very large portion of human misery, including poverty, disease, and crime, is induced by the use of alcoholic or fermented liquors, as beverages." See: *Belfast News-Letter*, May 14, 1857.

During the 1830s-50s a connection between alcohol and slavery was frequently made. Numerous articles in the local press regularly highlighted the link between sin and drunkenness, with alcohol to blame for eroding man's moral and religious code.[215] Sobriety, it was believed, would improve public morality, which, in turn, would impact on social issues such as abuse and slavery. In October 1841, a Belfast Temperance meeting noted: "[It is] true that alcoholic liquors weaken and debilitate the moral, intellectual, physical, and mechanical powers and faculties of man, and deprive him of his reason for the time being".[216] The same meeting discussed the "poor negro slave" and unanimously "reprobating it [slavery]."[217] Alcohol was described as the worst form of slavery:

> By that vice, its victim enslaves his wife, his children; and prevents his immortal soul from privately aspiring upwards its God: while the poor negro slave, although his body was in chains, might still send up fervent prayer to his Creator, an act of which the drunkard…was utterly incapable. There was the greatest difference in the world between the drunken, and the negro, slave. The one enslaved himself, while the other was enslaved involuntarily.[218]

In January 1845, the radical American abolitionist Revd H. C. Wright delivered a speech on Temperance at the well-attended Donegall Street Church.[219] Wright linked the sins of slavery and intemperance; his impassioned speeches on slavery the previous month

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[215] *Monitor, and Missionary Chronicle, of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, March 1, 1854; *Belfast News-Letter*, July 1, 1856; May 5, 1857; July 10, 1857; *Banner of Ulster*, February 17, 1857; *Weekly Vindicator*, November 4, 1848; November 18, 1848.
[216] *Vindicator*, October 23, 1841.
[217] Ibid., October 23, 1841.
[218] Ibid., October 23, 1841.
[219] Born in 1797, Henry Clarke Wright was a pastor in the Congregational Church of West Newbury, Massachusetts. Influenced by William Lloyd Garrison, Wright supported immediate abolition. See: Lewis Perry, *Radical abolitionism: anarchy and the government of God in antislavery thought*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 18.

were also likely to have attracted the larger turnout.[220] The *Commercial Chronicle* commented:

> Mr Wright is not only an anti-slavery man, but also an advocate of peace and temperance. He ardently denounces slavery, whether mental or bodily, wherever it exists…[and] condemns the slave holding system in America…he condemns the slave drinking system also, by which thousands of professed Christians there, but more especially in these lands, are ruining their health, their properties and their souls. While he recommends abolition of the accursed system as the sure of the evil in the one case, he also as strongly, and, we think, as consistently, recommends entire abstinence from the use of all intoxicating drinks as the only remedy in the other...I could occupy your attention till midnight in relating to you many affecting stories, and many tragic and horrible incidents, and occurrences, arising from the use of intoxicating drink.[221]

Echoing Wright's themes during visits to Belfast between 1845-46 was Frederick Douglass. At a meeting at the Lancastrian School Room, Douglass dwelt on personal experiences of alcohol and temperance during his enslavement, repeating the point that slavery to alcohol was worse than African slavery:

> Even when a slave, [Douglass] had not degraded himself by this vice [alcohol], and inwardly felt his superiority over his drunken white master, who in this respect was the greater slave of the two. The one evil held the body in cruel bondage – the other

[220] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, January 15, 1845. A month earlier on December 17, Wright gave a speech in which he stated that the Christian churches in the United States were so implicated in slavery that British churches should shun fellowship "until the foul stain [of slavery] was wiped away". See: Journal of H. C. Wright, December 17, 1844, Wright papers, Ms.q.Am.1859.v.31, Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts, US; *Northern Whig*, December 19, 1844; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, December 18, 1844. Also see: Ritchie, 'Evangelicalism, abolitionism, and Parnellism', 63.
[221] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, January 15, 1845.

> destroyed both body and soul…The Christian vows and resolves to pay; he pledges himself to the service of God, to truth and righteousness. This we ought all to do every day. I pledged myself, not to touch, taste, or handle, that which I saw destroyed its thousands and tens of thousands. I early resolved to look down upon my desperate oppressors and to be free.[222]

In 1851, the Revd Henry Highland Garnet also visited Belfast to address abolition and temperance. On Garnet, the *News-Letter* informed that he "was popular in "this neighbourhood for his lectures and speeches" and is a member of the American Anti-Slavery Society and advocate of freedom, temperance and education."[223] Garnet spoke not only of temperance but gave a detailed account of the US Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.[224]

In 1860, a meeting of the Irish Temperance League was held in Corn Market which highlighted the perceived connections between sin and alcohol. Dr Moore, the President of the Glenarm and Carnlough Total Abstinence Association, discussed the current struggles humanity faced and the role of alcohol:

> That in the great struggles of the age between truth and error, liberty and slavery, humanity and selfishness, self-indulgence and self-denial…that moderate drinkers, and every man who is indifferent will be held responsible for the evils done.[225]

The relationship between temperance and slave rhetoric would be long lasting. In 1862, the Irish Temperance League once again drew attention to the connection between alcohol and slavery by using the Bible to highlight their cause:

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[222] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, January 12, 1846.
[223] *Belfast News-Letter*, February 12, 1851.
[224] *Northern Whig*, January 18, 1851; *Belfast News-Letter*, January 22, 1851; *Ulster General Advertiser*, March 1, 1851.
[225] *Belfast News-Letter*, January 19, 1860.

> …some had even the hardihood to say that drinking was not denounced in the Bible, but on the contrary, that taking it in moderation was sanctioned. They knew little of that old Book who maintained this. But then slavery and polygamy were sought to be sustained by Scripture, and why not the slavery of intemperance?[226]

The following year the *News-Letter* reported a meeting which took place under the auspices of the Irish Temperance League.[227] The article, titled "The Champions of Slaves", discussed the details of the meeting which connected slavery in the United States with the 'slavery' of intemperance:

> About the end of last century, if so long ago, the slave trade was brooding like a pestilence over the world. Mr Kane drew a fearful picture of the horrors of the slave trade and of American slavery, and then referred to the labours of Grenville, Sharp, Wilberforce, Sir F. Baxton, Thomas Clarkson, Zachary Macanlay. Sir James Stephens, and others, through whom the slave trade was abolished. He then proceeded to speak on the slavery of intemperance, under which soul and body were alike enslaved.[228]

By discussing renowned abolitionists such as Clarkson, Grenville and Wilberforce the League were able to connect an illustrious moment in British history (the end of slavery) with the Temperance movement. By doing so, they were able to give the movement a measure of virtue while simultaneously displaying their own anti-slavery views.

It is evident that abolitionism and Temperance were entwined during this period. Numerous anti-slavery campaigners, including former slaves, regularly linked the immorality of alcohol and the immorality of slavery. Slavery robbed the slave of rights over

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[226] *Belfast News-Letter*, April 24, 1862.
[227] Ibid., May 19, 1863.
[228] Ibid., May 19, 1863.

their own body and family, while intemperance robbed the drunk of their ability to serve God, their family and society. Temperance would, it was hoped, further morality and Godliness which in turn would positively influence social issues such as slavery.

Survival and Development of the 'Irish Slave'

During the eighteenth-century perceptions of an 'Irish slave' were prevalent in Belfast, particularly amongst liberal (New-Light) Presbyterians and the perceived similarities between themselves and African slaves – the belief that both groups had been denied rights. The theme of the 'Irish slave' re-emerged, albeit in a different context, in the nineteenth century. Whilst in the eighteenth century the 'Irish slave' was understood to be a consequence of the government's treatment of Ireland's Catholics and Dissenters (the 'inferior Irish') by the nineteenth century the town's Presbyterians supported the Union.[229]

Post 1801, there was a stronger sense of 'Britishness' in Belfast. During the 1830s, for example, local MP's such as James Emerson Tennent promoted the British connection.[230] Th**e** British trend stemmed in part from fear of Catholic emancipation and the potential power of the Catholic Church. Such concerns were compounded by worries about the influx of migrants (Catholic and Protestant) from Ulster's hinterlands in the early to mid-nineteenth century that produced a dramatic rise in Belfast's population.[231] Yet, Britishness did not prevent the revival of the notion of the Irish as slaves. This is evident from an examination of the tenant rights campaign and the great famine.

During the 1830s and 40s one campaign crossed the religious divide and became significantly attached to the 'Irish slave' ideology – tenant rights. To date, no study has

[229] Catholicism was seen as the badge of the inferior race. See: Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, 56.
[230] *Repeal of the Union: Report of the debate in the House of Commons, on Mr. O'Connell's motion : and the proceedings in the House of Lords on Earl Grey's motion for concurring in the address of the Commons : April 1834*, (London: Charles Knight, 1834), 94; *Northern Whig*, March 20, 1838.
[231] In 1831 the town's population was recorded at 53,000 – from 19,000 in 1801. By 1851, the population had grown to 87,000 and by 1861 the population had once again increased to 121,000. This last increase was additionally affected by the changes to the town's boundary in 1853 which increased the area to ten square miles. See: Budge and O'Leary, *Belfast: Approach to Crisis*, 27-33; *Belfast News-Letter*, August 20, 1813.

noted the theme of the Irish slaves in relation to the nineteenth century tenant rights campaign. The agrarian and economic issues surrounding the tenant rights campaign were not new and had been carried over from the eighteenth century. However, criticism would peak in the nineteenth century. A significant lack of tenant rights produced comparisons between slavery and the ill treatment of the Irish. Here the Ascendancy and State Church would once more fulfil the callous roles they held in the eighteenth century.[232] Belfast's Catholics felt the slave analogy applied especially to them. They felt betrayed by the Act of Union and this sense of betrayal did not dissipate even after Catholic emancipation in 1829. Nationally, Irish Catholics were upset because their majority status did not translate into equal rights.[233] The prominent role that Catholics played in the demand for tenant rights would see the Irish slave theme link into the broader anti-slavery sentiment, particularly through the O'Connellite *Vindicator*.

The tenant rights campaign had substantial similarities to the campaign for religious and political freedom during the penal law years in the late eighteenth century. In both examples the Irish as slaves theme fed into support for the abolition of slavery more generally, as is evident in the following contemporary view:

> With the insufficient Irish representation "Ireland has no security for her rights if England has the disposition to invade them" …"Ireland holds her liberties at the will of England' and this 'the definition of slavery".[234]

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[232] *Northern Whig*, April 8, 1833; December 26, 1833; May 31, 1832; January 26, 1835; *Belfast News-Letter*, January 22, 1836; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, June 10, 1829; July 13, 1833; Donnelly, *Landlord and Tenant*; Timothy W. Guinnane and Ronald I. Miller, 'Bonds without Bondsmen: Tenant-Right in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', *The Journal of Economic History*, 56, No. 1 (Mar., 1996): 113-142; Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants*; Boyce, *Nineteenth Century Ireland*, 105-135.

[233] William Pitt the Younger had promised Catholic emancipation however George III refused to countenance it as he felt if he agreed it would go against his coronation oath to uphold Protestantism. This led to Pitt resigning. See: Jonathan Bardon, "The Act of Union." *Act of Union Virtual Library*, (http://www.actofunion.ac.uk/actofunion.htm) (accessed January 19, 2018); Murphy, *Abject Loyalty*, 3. For examples of Catholics using slave language see: *Belfast News-Letter*, June 7, 1811; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, June 8, 1811; October 16, 1811; April 6, 1812.

[234] *Draft of a letter by Wm. S. Crawford*. c.1844. P.R.O.N.I. Sharman Crawford Papers, D856/D/73, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Eleven years later this mentalité was still in evidence:

> …there is a desire on the part of many landlords to continue the serfdom of the tenant – there is a desire to keep up that irresponsible power which makes the tenant a slave and the landlord a tyrant.[235]

Catholic support for the tenant rights campaign was also prominent. In 1841, the *Vindicator* published an extract by the English Revd Baptist Noel, to draw attention to the inhumane treatment of Irish tenants by landlords.[236] The article, titled "Irish versus Negro Labourers", detailed how Noel – despite despising popery – demonstrated significant sympathy for the plight of the Irish tenants and commended them on their patience and gentleness under injury. While the article was appreciative of Noel's words, it was also resentful that the Irish had put up with such ill treatment for so long:

> although this…patience is a very nice virtue…if indulged too long, it becomes a degrading vice; and we must freely admit that we infinitely prefer the lusty, anti-starvation impatience of the Manchester and Birmingham men; and earnestly do we desire to assist in rousing our Irish fellow-men to a state of honest impatience of, and virtuous indignation against, starvation, and starvation's leaden-hearted propagators, the landlords. Our main purpose addressing our countrymen is, to teach them that while God has done more for them than for any people in the whole world, man has done more against them than against the most bemoaned and bepitied [sic] class that wear the fetters, or smart under the whip of the slave-driver and, above all, we would

[235] *Belfast News-Letter*, May 18, 1855.
[236] *Vindicator*, October 30, 1841.

> fain teach them that their sufferings will endure while they are content to hear them, and not one minute longer.[237]

The article went onto compare the "state of unalloyed wretchedness" of the Irish tenants/labourers with that of the free black labourers in the British West Indies and the American slaves. The article argued that of all, the Irish were the worse treated**:** the free black labourers, it was argued, were paid good wages and the American slaves were in better physical health than the Irish labourers.

For Catholic and Protestants, the employment of the Irish as slaves' analogy testifies to the power of inherited memory. The following example is taken from June 1838:

> Let all the friends of religious liberty cast aside their particular differences…if the tenant be oppressed by the landlord, let justice by done by proper laws and proper means; but let not the tenant think that he can protect himself against the oppression of the landlord by sustaining the oppression of the [established] church…Presbyterians of Ulster, have you forgotten the history of a period not very remote, when your forefathers suffered under the rod of ecclesiastical tyranny, administered by the hand of the State Church, through the means of the tyrannical act of uniformity? Do you forget how these upright men were persecuted – how they suffered imprisonment, banishment, and even death, for conscience sake?[238]

This anger continued into the 1850s due to the subjugation to landlords felt by many tenants. The latter compared themselves to the oppressed Africans – leading to further support for abolition and attracting attention to their own cause. An 1846 article on the Irish poor, published in the *Whig*, made reference to slavery in Africa and in Ireland thus:

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[237] *Vindicator*, October 30, 1841.
[238] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, June 18, 1838.

> There are a few who advocate the cause of the African slave; but I find none to advocate the cause of the Irish slave, in the manner in which it should be done. Through all her Majesty's dominions, the poor Irishman is to be found the slave doing all the drudgery, and happy is he, compared with those he has left behind, without any employment, shivering with cold and hunger; and millions are to be found in Ireland in this condition.[239]

The link between slavery in Africa and in Ireland in the tenants' rights campaign is clear in a poem published by the *Whig* in 1850:

> Where is the slave so lowly,
> Condemned to chain unholy,
> Who, could he burst
> His bonds at first,
> Would pine beneath them slowly?
> What soul whose wrongs degrade it
> Would wait 'till lime decay'd it,
> When thus its wing
> At once may spring
> To the Throne of Him who made it?
> We tread the land that bore us,
> The green flag flutters o'er us,
> The friends we're tried
> Are by our side,
> And the foe-"[240]

[239] *Northern Whig*, January 17, 1846.
[240] Ibid., October 1, 1850.

Belfast's anti-slavery sentiment was rooted in perceived experiences from the penal years. This tradition became entangled in the nineteenth century with issues relating to 'Britishness' and fear of the Catholic Church (Presbyterians), repeal (Catholics) and tenant rights (both).[241] In the 1840s, notions of the 'Irish slave' are apparent in contemporary reactions to the great famine. Despite a wealth of investigations into the Great Famine, the Irish as slaves and how this impacted on anti-slavery thought more generally has not been examined.

Starvation, Hypocrisy and Anti-Slavery: The 'Irish Slave'

In 1845, the great famine came to Ireland. While not as badly affected as other areas such as Cork, Ulster did not escape its destruction.[242] The link between slaves in Ireland and in Africa during the famine can be found in contemporary visitors' tales. During Frederik Douglass' visit to Ireland at the end of 1845, for example, he was shocked at the poverty he saw and likened it to a condition of slavery:

> Men and Women, married and single, old and young, lie down together, in much the same degradation as the American slaves. I see much here to remind me of my former condition, and I confess I should be ashamed to lift my voice against American slavery, but that I know the cause of humanity is one the world over.[243]

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[241] In the late eighteenth century, the town's catholic minority was very small. It would only be in the 1830s that local Catholics found a public forum in the local press with the establishment of the first Catholic newspaper in Belfast in 1833, the *Northern Herald*, to display their own views. However, there is evidence of a Catholic 'Irish slave' ideology earlier than the 1830s. In 1811 the details of a Roman Catholic meeting were published in the *Chronicle*: "…the enslavement of the Catholics in Ireland was no inconsiderable task, and their manumission might well expect to meet with a formidable opposition…" See: *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, October 16, 1811. Another meeting in 1828, used similar language to describe the Catholic situation in Ireland. See: *Belfast News-Letter*, January 8, 1828.

[242] Kinealy and Mac Atasney, *Hidden Famine*, 1. For more information on the famine see. In chronological order: Ó'Gráda, *The Great Irish Famine*; James S. Donnelly, *The Great Irish Potato Famine*, (Stroud: Sutton publishing, 2001; Ó Murchadha, *The Great Famine*; Enda Delaney and Breandán Mac Suibhne eds. *Ireland's Great Famine and Popular Politics*, (London: Routledge, 2015).

[243] *Liberator*, March 26, 1846. Douglass was vocal about the plight of the Irish (particularly Irish Catholics), with him believing the Catholic population "had a terrible indictment to bring against

Douglass' comments were similar to those written by visitors to Ireland in the early eighteenth century.[244] The Irish as slave theme was an enduring aspect of the town's support of anti-slavery movements globally.

During the famine, the local press emphasised the 'starving Irish' with descriptions of the emaciated faces of the young and old.[245] When the famine had ceased by 1852, there remained much anger at the scant aid provided by the British government. A majority of the dead were Catholic (except in parts of east Ulster).[246] The 'Irish slave' theme was rigorously pursued by the *Ulsterman,* a new Catholic newspaper that began to appear in 1852 following the closure of the *Vindicator.* In 1853, the *Ulsterman* carried a highly emotive article that prioritised the battle against slavery at home over anti-slavery campaigns abroad:

> We have heard a great deal of sentimentality, of late…the horrors of slavery have been wrung in our ears day after day. Uncle Tom's visage has met us…Every dusky "nigger" has appealed to our imagination like another George…Somehow, one is unable to resist the suspicious impression that it is all twaddle in the end…Is there no misery or suffering at home which more urgently and properly demands the attention of the very benevolent people who ramble all the way to America to find objects for their vicarious good nature?[247]

The *Ulsterman's* Irish nationalist views led it to accuse Belfast abolitionists of hypocrisy, criticising slavery involving foreigners while condoning the ill treatment of Irish Catholics at

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England". See: Patricia Ferreira, 'All But "A Black Skin and Wooly Hair": Frederick Douglass's Witness of the Irish Famine', *American Studies International*, 37, No. 2, (June 1999): 69-83, (p. 75).
[244] Lord Clonmell – the future Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench in Ireland – claimed that the "common Irish [were] divided, oppressed, pillaged and abused…" See: Scott, *Ireland before the Union,* 32-33.
[245] *Vindicator*, January 30, 1847.
[246] Christine Kinealy, *A Death-Dealing Famine: The Great Hunger in Ireland*, (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 152.
[247] *Ulsterman*, April 2, 1853.

home and abroad.[248] This is evident in an article of October 1853, "The White Niggers at home":

> American Slavery is a very unsightly institution, an ugly eyesore on the face of human nature. To hunt and to whip negroes, and make them the chattels of their fellow-men, is unnatural and immoral. Still, black slaves are taken pretty good care of, after all; for they are a property, and every sensible man is mindful to keep his chattels in a valuable state. The niggers are generally well-fed and housed, and in their old age they are taken care of…White Celts, used up and worn-out are things for the indifferent benevolent to waste no thought about. Black niggers are much more attractive objects of sympathy…[249]

The language used to describe the slaves as "niggers" was more inflammatory than that used in previous years, yet the accusation of hypocrisy was not new.[250] The article expressed the anger and desperation felt by some Catholics over their marginalisation that had most recently been felt in the lack of aid given to them during the Great Famine. The *Ulsterman* railed against this mistreatment, but in the context of slavery, argued that Catholics could rightfully occupy the moral high ground:

> It appears that in America there are upwards of six hundred and sixty thousand Negro slaves, who are the property of clergymen of the different Protestant denominations. Of these, the pious and godly Methodist ministers have three hundred and twelve

[248] *Northern Whig,* February 3, 1838; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, February 3, 1838. Both newspapers discussed the criticism of the abolitionist Lord Brougham by British conservative newspapers, who accused him of ignoring the suffering at home while directing attention abroad towards the slaves.
[249] *Ulsterman*, October 15, 1853.
[250] *Northern Whig,* February 3, 1838; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, February 3, 1838. Both newspapers discussed the criticism of the abolitionist Lord Brougham by British conservative newspapers, who accused him of ignoring the suffering at home while directing attention abroad towards the slaves.

> thousand five hundred slaves to themselves. The Evangelical Baptist preachers have the pretty number of one hundred and twenty-five thousand. One hundred thousand more of these human chattels are the property of ministers of a sect called the Campbellites…Thus well provided with human flesh and blood, their property to sell or let out, to feed or to flog are the pious and self-sacrificing teachers of "evangelical Christianity" in enlightened Protestant America. What pleasant picture! How touchingly in keeping with pure Bible morality!...But softly! There is one class of men yet left out. As we profess to do justice to all, let us omit none. We have passed over that body of clerics who pay religious homage the Pope of Rome. How many slaves have the Catholic priests in America! *None*. Eh? Do you mean to say that while ministers of all the different Protestant sects are well provided with niggers, the Catholic priests alone are without slaves Exactly! There is not a priest of the Catholic Church in all the United States who has, or ever had, a single slave![251]

The 'Irish slave' theme is apparent, but now takes precedence over foreign slaves. There is also the view that African slaves were, if anything, better treated than the Irish slave.[252]

Driving the *Ulsterman's* outlook was undoubtedly its interpretation of Catholic disproportionate suffering in the Great Famine. It has been estimated that over one million died as a result of the famine with little aid coming from the British government.[253] This loss of life was contained primarily to Ireland's poor – most often Catholic. That the country's poor had largely been abandoned only solidified the belief that Irish citizens had long been trapped on a scale of slavery from the eighteenth century.[254] The *Ulsterman*'s argument – that African slaves were treated better than the Irish poor – is not wholly incorrect. In the

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[251] *Ulsterman*, May 14, 1856.
[252] Ibid., January 15, 1853; January 26, 1853; January 8, 1853.
[253] Phelim P. Boyle and Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Fertility Trends, Excess Mortality, and the Great Irish Famine', *Demography*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (1986): 543-562, (p. 554). Also see: R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1872*, (London: Penguin, 1988); Peter Gray, *The Irish Famine*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995).
[254] In 1760 the *Dublin Courier* discussed the "several degrees of slavery to which the nation may be gradually subjected…". *Dublin Courier*, January 14, 1760.

United States, the slave trade had been abolished in 1808, and as a result slaves were a valuable commodity to slave owners, as they were not easily replaced. For this reason alone (while significantly and inhumanely abused) slaves would generally not have been left to starve, simply because the slave-owner would not have benefitted from his investment.[255]

There is no doubt that the *Ulsterman* was significantly different in how it viewed African slavery compared to the earlier Catholic newspapers. However, while the paper displayed the resentment and bitterness of Irish Catholics towards the British government - and even the slaves themselves – it did not condone slavery:

> American Slavery is a very unsightly institution, an ugly eyesore on the face of human nature. To hunt and to whip negroes, and make them the chattels of their fellow-men, is unnatural and immoral…[256]

The *Ulsterman* carried adverts for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and discussions of the treatment of fugitive slaves and the attempts to nullify the Fugitive Slave Act.[257] In December 1853, the paper expressed sympathy for the slaves and their inability to escape slavery due to the Fugitive Slave Act: "Our strongest feelings have been called forth for those who, within the wide boundaries of the United States, have no city of refuge for which they can fly to safety."[258] Yet, despite such articles, there is no doubt that a meaningful change to the anti-slavery sentiment had taken place. The accusation of hypocrisy levelled at the town's Protestants by the paper remained common, with the paper criticising those at home who, due to religious reasons, ignored the guilty actions of friends in America who owned slaves.[259]

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[255] Herbert C. Covey and Dwight Eisnach, *What the Slaves Ate: Recollections of African American Foods and Foodways from the Slave Narratives*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 11.
[256] *Ulsterman*, October 15, 1853.
[257] Ibid., April 20, 1853; May 30, 1855.
[258] Ibid., December 14, 1853.
[259] Ibid., May 14, 1856.

The nationalist *Ulsterman* was not the only Catholic newspaper in Belfast. In 1855, the very liberal *Belfast Morning News* was founded.[260] The *Morning News* had similarities with the *Ulsterman* in regard to some of its political views such as tenant rights, but it avoided bitter rhetoric typical of the *Ulsterman* when it discussed slavery. Here it repeated views set out in the *Vindicator* in the 1840s.

Conclusion

During the early Victorian period, Belfast's long-standing anti-slavery sentiment was substantially affected by numerous influences. Issues surrounding Britishness and growing conservatism in the town, both politically and religiously, produced increased sectarianism and stoked fears relating to the power of the Catholic Church. For the town's Catholics, anger at their treatment, both at home and in wider Britain, led to support for movements such as O'Connell's Repeal Association and the Young Irelanders. Yet, despite such tensions, Belfast anti-slavery activity drew support from across religious, ideological, and identity divides, despite some fluctuations in support. Visits by members of the BFASS in the 1840s demonstrate that Belfast was recognised as a centre of abolitionist strength throughout Britain. This was reinforced by the numerous visits of renowned abolitionists such as Garrison and Douglass in the 1840s and 50s.

The Belfast press continued to play a significant role in anti-slavery propaganda. Abolitionism cut across divisions, including religion, so that different sectional publications pursued a shared anti-slavery agenda. The conservative *News-Letter*, for example, criticised Daniel O'Connell and the Repeal Association, but praised the same O'Connell when he addressed anti-slavery.[261]

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[260] The *Morning News* was owned by Catholics and would become the main Catholic newspaper in Belfast. It would be the longest running Belfast Catholic newspaper in the 1800s, ceasing publication in 1892. It would be so successful that by July 1856 it was selling 7, 080 copies an issue, far ahead of its nearest rival the Northern Whig which was selling 1,795 an issue. For more information see: Appendix 2.

[261] *Belfast News-Letter*, May 29, 1838.

Prior to 1837, there was one Catholic newspaper in Belfast, the *Northern Herald* in 1833. Between 1839 and 1856 three new Catholic newspapers were established, reflecting the growth in the local Catholic population. All but one of these Catholic newspapers was vehemently anti-slavery. It could be argued that the *Ulsterman*'s less vocal support was due to the distressing events which affected the Irish in this period. The impact of the famine and the lack of aid by the British government produced much anger, including the view that the Irish were the worst of all ill-treated slaves.

In the earlier years of the nineteenth century, the town's Quakers played a minimal role within the local anti-slavery circles. Bar several petitions and several Quaker families ordering copies of the *British Anti-Slavery Reporter,* local Friends were largely on the fringes of the town's anti-slavery sentiment – unlike the significant role they held in Britain.[262] However, the creation of the *Irish Friend* in 1838 catapulted the town's anti-slavery sentiment onto a much larger stage and publicised the opinions of local Quakers throughout Britain. Much like the popular Presbyterian *News-Letter* and Catholic *Vindicator,* the liberal *Irish Friend* demonstrated that the town's anti-slavery sentiment had grown outside of the dominant denominations – anti-slavery support had crossed religious boundaries.

In June 1840, members of the BASS attended the BFASS World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, with the Belfast Society an auxiliary of the official British Society. Yet within five years, the Belfast Society would be severely damaged due to the relationship between the PCI and the Scottish Free Kirk, and by 1853 the Society was disbanded. The BASS's criticism of the Free Kirk led to declining support for the 'official' society, while the town's anti-slavery sentiment continued to be expressed through its press and local campaigns.

Following the formation of the Belfast Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society in 1846, the town had another official society to communicate with abolitionists around the world. The

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[262] *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 1826, Pike Papers, D3491/A/4, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.

lauded visits of prominent abolitionists – which resulted in the formation of the BLASA – was an important landmark in female activism in anti-slavery. Unfortunately, after a promising launch the association's impact was severely weakened due to the impact of the famine.[263] Nevertheless, the association continued to function, emphasising an anti-slavery education for Irish migrants.[264]

One theme long connected to Belfast's anti-slavery outlook was perceptions of the 'Irish slave'. This theme continued to thrive.[265] In the early Victorian period there is plentiful evidence of the 'Irish slave' in discussions of tenant rights and the famine, although, as we have seen above, different religious groups felt this to various extents.

The great famine would cause irrevocable damage to the relationship between Britain and Ireland – with the British government making an apology in 1997 for its inactions for the humanitarian tragedy.[266] The famine significantly affected local Catholic anti-slavery sentiment. At its most radical **c**harges of hypocrisy were aimed towards local Protestants whereas in previous years, the British government and the elite were the targets.

In the early to mid-nineteenth-century anti-slavery sentiment in Belfast was very much in evidence. In part this was due to the continuity of themes from the previous century, most notably the Irish slaves. But they took on new life in a radically changing local context of population growth, religious change, and disasters such as the famine. Overall, Belfast's anti-slavery sentiment in the early Victorian era often reflected the ongoing religious and social changes in Belfast in this period.

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[263] Despite the significant relief the Ladies Association had provided, when they asked for finance from the government to continue, they were refused. See: Trevelyan to Ladies' Relief Associations in Ireland, October 10, 1847, Irish Relief Papers, HO 45/1942, National Archives, London.
[264] The departure of Mary Webb and her family to Dublin in 1848, was also a blow to the association.
[265] The Union did not give Catholic emancipation as promised by PM Pitt the younger. Alongside growing sectarianism, a selection of local Presbyterians no longer believed in the bond between Catholics and Dissenters that was seen in the late eighteenth century.
[266] See: Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine*, 12.

Chapter Four

"Whether freedom or slavery should be the grand characteristic of the United States": Belfast Abolitionism and the American Civil War

Following the end of the British slave system in 1838, with the abolishment of the apprentice system, Belfast abolitionists focused their anti-slavery agitation upon the slave system in the United States. The abolition of the American slave system as a consequence of the American Civil War draws our examination of abolitionist thought and activity in Belfast to a close. The topic of Belfast abolitionist responses to the slavery issue in the context of the American Civil War is much understudied.

The American Civil War has been thoroughly examined in its domestic political, military and anti-slavery contexts. Recently there has also been increased interest in how the British viewed the war.[1] In addition, the role of Irish emigrants has caught academic interest due to the considerable number of Irish fighting on both sides of the conflict.[2] Yet, there has been scant historical attention into how the war was viewed in Ireland.[3] Two studies will be

[1] For these various studies see, in chronological order: Alfred Grant, *The American Civil War and the British Press*, (Jefferson: McFarland, 2000); R. J. M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001); Duncan Andrew Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003); James J. Barnes and Patience P. Barnes, eds., *The American Civil War Through British Eyes: April 1862-February 1863*, (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003); Amanda Foreman, *A World on Fire: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War*, (New York: Random House, 2012); Thomas E. Sebrell II, *Persuading John Bull: Union and Confederate Propaganda in Britain, 1860–65*, (London: Lexington, 2014); Hugh DuBrulle, *Ambivalent Nation: How Britain Imagined the American Civil War*, (Baton Rouge: : Louisiana State University Press, 2018).

[2] See, in chronological order: Joseph G. Bilby, *The Irish Brigade in the Civil War: The 69th New York and Other Irish Regiments of the Army of the Potomac*, (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1997); Christian G. Samito, *Becoming American Under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship During the Civil War Era*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009); Thomas J. Craughwell, *The Greatest Brigade: How the Irish Brigade Cleared the Way to Victory in the American Civil War*, (Beverly, M.A.: Fair Winds press, 2011); Cal McCarthy, *Green, Blue, and Grey: The Irish in the American Civil War*, (Cork: Collins Press, 2009); David T. Gleeson, *Green and the Gray: The Irish in the Confederate States of America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Damien Shiels, *The Irish in the American Civil War*, (Dublin: History Press Ireland, 2013).

[3] One excellent study on the views of the Irish towards the American Civil War is by Joseph M. Hernon, Jr. *Celts, Catholics & Copperheads: Ireland views the American Civil War*, (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1968). Also see: Daniel Ritchie, 'War, religion and anti-slavery ideology: Isaac Nelson's radical abolitionist examination of the American civil war', *Historical Research*, 89, Issue. 246, (November 2016): 799-823.

of significance in this chapter. The first, Joseph Hernon Jnr's *Celts, Catholics and Copperheads: Ireland views of the American Civil War*, published in 1968, provides an excellent analysis of Ireland's views of the American Civil War. The second study by Francis Carroll, 'Belfast and the American Civil War', raises some important questions as to why Belfast's press responded to the war as they did.[4] However, this chapter will disagree with the assertion that Belfast displayed a "painfully strong "partiality for the South"".[5] An analysis of the rich extant local press reveals a much more complex picture. Belfast abolitionists were constant advocates for the emancipation of the American slaves and regularly criticised the South for its inhumane treatment and ownership of human beings. The strength of anti-slavery agitation in Belfast refutes the claim that Belfast was pro-Confederacy as it ceded from the Union over slavery, the financial backbone of the South.[6] According to Carroll's analysis of John Young's diaries (US Consul to Belfast during the war), Belfast was unmoved by the issue of slavery, indifferent to the Union cause, and sympathetic to the Confederacy.[7] This chapter contends that Belfast's long-held ideas of liberty and natural rights – which permeated all of the religious denominations in the town to varying degrees – and the positive economic consequences for Belfast of the cotton blockade on the southern states, produced much more varied responses than has previously been understood.

The lacuna the chapter is aiming to fulfil is the perceptions in Belfast of slavery in the American Civil War. It will examine the case for abolition in the build up to the Civil War, views of the North and South, and how particular issues during the war affected Belfast outlooks. Key questions of this chapter include: How was the case for abolition in America presented in Belfast in the immediate years prior to the outbreak of the war? Did the war

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[4] Ibid., 245-60.
[5] Ibid., 247.
[6] A number of the States who seceded from the US, stated in their Secession speech that it was due to the threat of abolishing slavery. See: "The Declaration of Causes of Seceding States", *American Battlefield Trust*, (https://www.battlefields.org/learn/primary-sources/declaration-causes-seceding-states) (accessed June 25, 2018).
[7] Recent work by Carroll, which focuses on the United States Consul to Belfast, Dr John Young, has largely reinforced this view. See: Carroll, 'Belfast and the American Civil War', 245-60.

affect or impact Belfast and/or Ireland and if so, in what ways? Did notions of the 'Irish slave' affect impressions of the war? How did the inherited memory of abolitionism affect reactions to the war? Did the town's growing 'Britishness' affect local citizens view of the war?

The study of Belfast's abolitionist reaction to the American Civil War has not been studied in the context of the town's long tradition of anti-slavery agitation. This strong history of local abolitionism guaranteed a firm interest in events across the Atlantic, an interest that was only strengthened given the patterns of Irish migration to North America and the events of the period. Additionally, the economic aspect that influenced Belfast responses to the war has not been studied. This chapter will demonstrate that while Belfast's citizens and press were not ardent supporters of the Union, nor were they supportive of the Confederacy. The one cause they remained committed to was abolition.

Emotive Abolitionism: 1858-1861

In October 1859 a slave insurrection, led by abolitionist John Brown, took place in Harpers Ferry, Virginia, a pro-slavery State in the United States. Within two days the uprising was over, with the insurrectionists either dead, arrested or on the run. Shipping times meant a delay in this news reaching Belfast. The local dailies first reported the event twelve days later, with bi and tri-weekly newspapers following soon after.[8] Simultaneously during this period there was extensive newspaper coverage of the sinking of the steam clipper the *Royal Charter* in British waters only days earlier.[9] While national attention focused on the wreck, the Belfast press emphasised the significance of the Harpers Ferry rebellion.[10]

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[8] *Belfast News-Letter*, October 28, 1859; *Belfast Mercury*, October 28, 1859; *Northern Whig*, October 28, 1859; *Belfast Weekly News*, October 29, 1859; *Belfast Morning News*, October 29, 1859, 2.

[9] The *Royal Charter* sank off the coast of Anglesey on October 26, 1859 during a storm. It is estimated that over 450 lives lost. The steam clipper, returning from Australia, carried on board a large consignment of gold. For more information see: Alexander McKee, *The Golden Wreck: the tragedy of the "Royal Charter"*. (London: Souvenir Press, 1986); *Belfast Mercury*, October 27, 1859; *Belfast News-Letter*, October 27, 1859; *Northern Whig*, October 28, 1859; *Belfast Weekly News*, October 29, 1859.

[10] *Belfast Mercury*, October 28, 1859; *Northern Whig*, October 31, 1859; *Belfast Morning News*, November 7, 1859; *Belfast News-Letter*, November 14, 1859.

In US abolitionist historiography the Harpers Ferry raid is seen as a significant event in the run up to the Civil War.[11] Contemporaries thought similarly, with Frederick Douglass – who visited Belfast in the mid-1840s – commenting that "if John Brown did not end the war that ended slavery, he did, at least, begin the war that ended slavery…"[12] John Brown's trial was covered in detail in several Belfast newspapers, both Catholic and Protestant.[13] The liberal Catholic newspaper the *Morning News*, for example, published sympathetic articles detailing the failed insurrection in Harpers Ferry, and the trials of its participants.[14] This sympathy did not extend to full extent in all of the local press.

The orthodox Presbyterian *Banner of Ulster*, for instance, was at first exceedingly negative towards the raid's ringleader John Brown.[15] While pro-abolition, orthodox Presbyterians did not uphold violent uprisings however, over the period of Brown's trial, the *Banner* softened its stance and became more sympathetic closer to the date of Brown's execution in December 1859.[16] The execution elicited broader attention and sympathy for Brown and his cause. In late December, several local newspapers, including the *News-Letter* and *Morning News*, published an interview given by Brown and his wife, and a copy of his last letter to his family, written whilst awaiting his execution.[17] The press coverage of Brown's final days was emotive:

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[11] See, in chronological order: Evan Carton, *Patriotic Treason: John Brown and the Soul of America*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006); Tony Horwitz, *Midnight Rising: John Brown and the Raid That Sparked the Civil War*, (London: Macmillan, 2011); John Stauffer and Zoe Trodd, eds., *The Tribunal: Responses to John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[12] Frederick Douglass, *'John Brown', An address by Frederick Douglass, at the fourteenth anniversary of Storer college, Harper's Ferry, West Virginia*, (Dover, N.H.: Morning Star job Printing House, 1881).

[13] *Northern Whig*, October 28, 1859; November 4, 1859; *Belfast Mercury*, November 9, 1859; November 14, 1859; *Belfast Morning News*, November 15, 1859; December 27, 1859; *Belfast News-Letter*, November 19, 1859; December 19, 1859; *Belfast Morning News*, October 29, 1859; November 18, 1859.

[14] *Belfast Morning News*, October 28, 1859; October 29, 1859; November 1, 1859; November 8, 1859; November 1, 1859; November 7, 1858; November 14, 1859; November 15, 1859; November 18, 1859; December 20, 1859; December 21, 1859; December 22, 1859; December 26, 1859.

[15] *Banner of Ulster*, October 29, 1859; November 1, 1859; November 8, 1859.

[16] Ibid., November 12, 1859; December 17, 1859.

[17] *Belfast News-Letter*, December 22, 1859; *Belfast Morning News*, December 21, 1859: December 22, 1859; *Belfast Mercury*, December 22, 1859.

> The unfortunate man met his fate with a calmness and serenity of a martyr; and whilst it must be conceded that, in the eyes of the law, his attempt was punishable by death, it must also be admitted that with the execution of Brown the United States have affixed upon themselves a blot which will not be erased until slavery is finally abolished…[18]

Although there was some discomfort with the tactic of insurrection, in general the Belfast press was sympathetic to the reasoning behind Harpers Ferry. John Brown and his followers represented liberty against the oppressive system of slavery. Brown's execution in December 1859 elicited sympathy even amongst the initially more sceptical of the Belfast press. The martyrisation of Brown was echoed in the Belfast press.

Emotive Stories: Inhumanity

In May 1856, numerous newspapers criticised the "sacking of Lawrence", in which a pro-slavery force attacked and ransacked the abolitionist town of Lawrence, Kansas.[19] The Belfast press was appalled at the attack:

> The State of Kansas has been peopled, in great part, by settlers from free States, avowedly with the intention of saving it from the pollution of slavery. The Government which they organised has been overturned, and their electors driven from the poll by armed bands of rowdies from Missouri and elsewhere, and a slave Legislature forcibly placed over their heads. Nay, more: hordes of ruffians, armed to the teeth, raised up and kept together the United States Marshal, ostensibly as a "posse'' to enable him to effect arrests upon trumped-up charges of treason, when no opposition was neither offered or intended, they are laying waste to the whole country,

[18] *Belfast News-Letter*, December 19, 1859.
[19] Richard A. Ruddy, *Edmund G. Ross: Soldier, Senator, Abolitionist*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 22-23.

> they have already sacked and burned in cold blood the town of Lawrence, and, having spread themselves over the State in gangs, are murdering and robbing all Abolitionists they can lay hands upon…The Kansas settlers, finding themselves outlawed, and at the mercy of ferocious and drunken rabble, the scum of the Southern seaboard, and find that neither protests nor submission can save them from the horrors of licensed brigandage, and are arming themselves rapidly for the defence of their lives and their homes. Civil war has actually begun…[20]

The *News-Letter* displayed similar disgust:

> Nothing of ancient or medieval cruelty on a National scale… [approaches] in horror the bloody tragedy of Kansas, and the ferocious conduct of the demonic actors, the slave-drivers of Missouri.[21]

The Belfast press also levelled criticism at the US government for its inaction. Overall, the reaction in Belfast was of abhorrence at the violence and inhumanity of pro-slavery forces. This strengthened local support for the abolition of slavery.

Criticism of the abuse of abolitionists by pro-slavery supporters, like that seen in Kansas, was common. In 1861, the *News-Letter* reported the flogging of an Englishman in Mississippi.[22] He was accused of being an abolitionist and aiding in the escape of a slave. The slave was apparently coerced into giving a false confession under fear of flogging. As a consequence, both men suffered the punishment. The Englishman suffered an additional indignity of having hot tar poured over him, with cotton added for dramatic effect.[23]

The employment of emotive language was common in local press coverage, particularly when discussing liberty and natural rights. Emotive abolitionist rhetoric was

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[20] *Northern Whig*, June 21, 1856.
[21] *Belfast Morning News*, October 14, 1856.
[22] *Belfast News-Letter*, January 4, 1861.
[23] Ibid., January 4, 1861.

evident, for example, in an article of 1856 in the *Banner*.[24] This recounted the story of a young slave sold to a new owner. The boy – denied a last goodbye to his mother – ran from the coach couriering him to his new owner, into a local wood. When the coach driver was overheard discussing the event with a passenger, he commented that "[the boy] will skulk about the woods until nearly starved then return to his [old] master's house… [then] he will be on this coach again in handcuffs…." The driver went on to exclaim that slavery "is a cursed business; but in this case this is not the worst feature in it. The man who sold him is his own father".[25] This article shows marked similarities to those seen in the late 1790s and early 1800s;[26] a direct appeal to a reader's emotions to communicate the inhumanity and abusive nature of slave-owners.

In January 1862, the *Morning News*, reported the events surrounding a group of escaped slaves, who had enrolled in the Union army.[27] While on duty the slaves were involved in arresting their former master for being a rebel. The former slaves – while not taking part in the physical arrest of the slaveowner due to having "not yet gotten over their awe of a master" – couriered the prisoner to jail in his own boat. On the journey they sang a song to the tune of one of their hymns:

> O Massa a rebel, row him to prison. Hallelujah.
>
> Massa no whip us any more. Hallelujah.
>
> We have no massa now; we free. Hallelujah.
>
> We have the Yankees, who no run away. Hallelujah.
>
> O! all our old massas run away. Hallelujah.
>
> O! massa going prison now. Hallelujah.[28]

[24] *Banner of Ulster*, December 25, 1856.
[25] Ibid., December 25, 1856.
[26] *Belfast News-Letter*, April 6, 1792; *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, September 21, 1816; *Belfast News-Letter*, September 5, 1828; *Banner of Ulster*, October 25, 1844.
[27] *Belfast Morning News*, January 1, 1862.
[28] *Belfast Morning News*, January 1, 1862.

Emotive articles in this period were the most prominent means of propaganda in Belfast's anti-slavery press. In October 1862, the *Morning News* published details of a slave sale in Richmond, Virginia. The newspaper labelled the American slave system a "monster evil of American society".[29] It painted in dark detail the scene of a slave market:

> The interior of these places is decidedly sordid and repulsive—in perfect keeping with the purpose to which they are applied. A dim, though by no means religious, light struggles through the dirty windows…In the centre of the room…is a platform…on which "property" is exposed for sale, and where the auctioneer also stands, while he expatiates on the merits of the wares which he offers to the notice of his patrons.[30]

The article bemoaned the inhumanity of stripping naked men, women and children in order to determine if they were of "good stock". The separation of families was also described in condemnatory tones. With stories such as this regularly reported alongside criticism of the Southern States seceding from the Union, the strength and continuity in Belfast abolitionism is evident. Abolitionist sympathies continued unabated throughout 1861 and 1862.

Growing Tensions: liberty and hypocrisy

By 1859, it had become clear that the Northern and Southern states were on course for a civil war, with a prospective war already mentioned several years earlier.[31] It was quickly apparent that for the majority of Belfast's press, sympathy was with the North. Local press coverage contrasted the humanity of slaves and the abuse they suffered as a way to elicit readers' sympathy for abolition. In April 1859, for example, the *Morning News* recounted a slave auction in the United States.[32] It consisted of the sale of over 429 slaves, including men, women and children. The particulars of the sale made for bleak reading and contained

[29] Ibid., October 8, 1862.
[30] Ibid., October 8, 1862.
[31] *Northern Whig*, June 21, 1856.
[32] *Belfast Morning News*, April 19, 1859. The report was taken from the *New York Daily Tribune*.

information on the slaves' personal lives, which included violent abuse and the loss of children through death and/or sale. It outlined the traits highly sought after by potential buyers:

> There were no light mulattoes in the whole lot of the Butler stock, and but very few that were even a shade removed from the original Congo blackness. They have been little defiled by the admixture of degenerate Anglo-Saxon blood, and, for the most part, could boast that they were of as pure a breed as the bluest blonde of Spain—a point in their favour in the eyes of the buyer, as well as physiologically; for too liberal an infusion of the blood of the dominant race brings a larger intelligence, a more vigorous brain, which anon grows restless under the yoke, and is prone to inquire into the definition of the word liberty, and the meaning of the starry flag which waves, as you may have heard, o'er the land of the free. The pure-blooded negroes are much more docile and manageable than mulattoes, though quick of comprehension, which makes them preferred by drivers, who can stimulate stupidity by the lash much easier than they can control intelligence by it.[33]

Abolitionism was the dominant factor in Belfast reactions to the growing division in America. The press also admitted that abolitionism would not be without its complications.[34] In January 1858, for example, the *Morning News* carried a passionate call for the abolition of slavery in the United States. It also identified that preparatory work would be required:

> To cast loose upon society three or four millions of persons trained up in bondage, and, therefore, as a rule, knowing nothing of self-government, and not inclined to obey any laws, except those enforced by the lash, would be a serious mistake; but to

[33] *Belfast Morning News*, April 19, 1859.
[34] *Northern Whig*, December 31, 1861.

> postpone indefinitely the period for accomplishing the overthrow of so abhorred an institution would be to enlarge the evil.[35]

There was thus a concern that a lack of education and knowledge in societal customs that the slaves had been denied would act as barriers to slaves succeeding post-emancipation.[36] It was also argued that this was a deliberate policy to retain slavery: "[slave owners] have enacted laws… to prohibit the education of the black population."[37]

Lincoln's election: anti-slavery fervour and threat of secession

In 1860 Abraham Lincoln was elected the sixteenth President of the United States. The Southern States were unhappy as they saw Lincoln as a threat to slavery.[38] In October 1860, for example, the *Charleston Mercury* discussed the possibility of the repeal of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law: "[when a party is elected] whose creed it is to repeal the Fugitive Slave Laws, the under-ground railroad will become an over-ground railroad."[39]

The growing tensions in America were followed closely in Belfast. The *News-Letter*, for instance, detailed the threat of secession: "*The Herald* of Wednesday has a leading article in favour of succession of the Southern states in the event of Mr. Lincoln's election."[40] The Belfast press reacted with an increase of anti-slavery fervour.[41] The stakes were set out clearly:

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[35] *Belfast News-Letter*, January 21, 1858.
[36] Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, 25-30.
[37] *Belfast News-Letter*, January 21, 1858.
[38] Harold Holzer, *Lincoln President-Elect: Abraham Lincoln and the Great Secession Winter 1860-1861*, (New York: Simon and Schuster), 46.
[39] *Charleston Mercury*, October 11, 1860, quoted in *Southern editorials on Secession*, ed. by Dwight L. Dumond, (New York: The Century Company, 1931), 179.
[40] *Belfast News-Letter*, November 17, 1860.
[41] *Northern Whig*, November 23, 1860; *Belfast Morning News*, November 24, 1860.

> The South has discovered it has no monopoly of power, and that the Government of the United States is not its heirloom…there is no question that the principle at stake is, whether freedom or slavery should be the grand characteristic of the United States.[42]

Once again poetry as a literary form featured in the town's abolitionist propaganda in the context of the American civil war. In January 1861, for example, a poem in the *Mercury* mocked the Southern States:

> Secede, ye Southern States, secede,
> No better plan could be,
> If you of Niggers would be freed,
> To set your Niggers free.
> Runaway slaves federal law
> At present you reclaim;
> So from the Union straight withdraw.
> And play the free soil game.
>
> What, when you've once the knot untied,
> Will bind the Northern men?
> And who'll resign your cowhide
> The fugitives again?
> Absquotilate [sic], then, slick grease,
> And break up Unity.
> Or take your President in peace,
> And eat your humble pie.

[42] *Belfast News-Letter*, November 22, 1860.

> But If your stomachs proud disdain
> That salutary meal,
> And yon, in passion worse than vain,
> Most rend the commonweal,
> Then all mankind will jest and scoff
> At people in the case,
> Of him that hastily cut off
> His nose to spite his face.[43]

The folly of secession was so apparent that commentary in the Belfast press saw the Southern States as simply blustering, and doubted whether secession would actually take place:

> The latest news from the United States informs us that great anxiety existed that, should the Republican, or Anti-Slavery party, succeed in securing the election of Lincoln, the Southern or pro-Slavery States will dissolve the Confederation. The Clergy have commenced to pray that such a calamity may be averted, but we confess we have not much faith in the prayers of Clergymen who have pandered to Slavery, and many of whom—to the disgrace of their Protestant profession—uphold Slavery as a divine institution. The dissolution of the Union is inevitable event, but it will not happen in our generation. — The South may bluster and talk of bowie knives and revolvers, but a secession is quite different thing.[44]

These hopes quickly evaporated. In December 1860, the state of South Carolina seceded. The Belfast press covered the secession, the reasoning behind it and the aims of the

[43] *Belfast Mercury*, January 12, 1861. The poem was also published in the *Banner of Ulster*, January 12, 1861.
[44] *Belfast Mercury*, November 17, 1860.

seceding states.[45] There was opposition to the Southern States seceding so that they could retain slavery, with the *Morning News* arguing that the secession only took place as the "pro-slavery orators had committed themselves too far to recede."[46] The *Mercury lampooned* the argument of the Southern States that they seceded as a response to Lincoln's election. It argued that Lincoln's election was nothing more than "an imaginary or symbolic grievance… [and] the ostensible points in dispute are the rights of possessing slaves in the territories and the unconstitutional acts by which some free States have rendered the Fugitive Slave law inoperative."[47] While much criticism was levelled at the Southern States because of slavery, Belfast would soon experience a much-needed economic boom due to an unexpected benefit of the Civil War. This economic aspect is worth covering because it has not received due historical attention. It also did not impact as negatively on the abolitionist cause in Belfast as one might expect.

Abolitionism, the Economy, "Linenopolis" and a Cotton Famine

Belfast's economy was to be greatly impacted by the outbreak of the American Civil War. There were initial concerns that the town's linen exports to the US would be negatively affected. After all, around forty-one per cent of Ireland's linen exports went to the US.[48] Concern grew that a Civil War would harm the Belfast economy by threatening exports and hitting a linen industry that had just begun to display signs of improvement. As a result, "the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861 was viewed very darkly [by Belfast citizens] …and pessimism prevailed for several months afterwards."[49] This pessimism took root in an economy already weakened by the impact of the famine. The death toll of the famine and the excessive immigration during and after seen the country lose thirty percent of its

[45] Ibid., January 8, 1861; January 14, 1861; *Northern Whig*, January 8, 1861; January 15, 1861; *Belfast News-Letter*, January 8, 1861; January 14; January 17, 1861.
[46] *Belfast Morning News*, January 2, 1861.
[47] Ibid., January 2, 1861.
[48] Ollerenshaw, *Belfast Banks*, 105.
[49] Ollerenshaw, *Belfast Banks*, 105.

population.[50] Yet, despite the threat of war and the potential damaging effect on the economy, Belfast's press continued, as in previous years, to pursue abolitionism and criticise the pro-slavery States.

Initial pessimism on the economic impact of the American Civil War on the Belfast economy were confounded by 1863 at which point the local economy was experiencing some notable economic advantages.[51] The Union blockade on Southern ports presented an opportunity for Irish linen to replace the Slave States cotton.[52] The local linen industry thrived, although the small hand loom cotton weaving industry was all but decimated by the impact of the cotton shortage.[53]

The shortage damaged cotton industries around the globe, with Britain's industry heavily affected.[54] Despite a belief in the Southern States that Britain would come to the defence of the Confederacy over fear of a cotton shortage, the British remained neutral.[55] In previous years, with a civil war looking likely, the British government had stockpiled cotton in the event of a shortage and had sufficient cotton to last until late 1862. It also sought alternative materials, including Irish linen. As a result, the demand for Irish linen heavily increased.

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[50] Donnelly, *Irish Potato Famine*, 169-186. A series of crop failures from 1860-63 further contributed to recent economic difficulties. See: Hernon, *Celts, Catholics and Copperheads*, 5.
[51] *Belfast News-Letter*, January 15, 1863.
[52] Prior to 1861, the American cotton industry was one of the world's largest industries with the Southern States providing the majority of the supply to England. However, in April 1861 cotton exports halted, due to the cotton blockade. As a result, the Southern States cotton exportation was only one-tenth of its pre-war years between 1862-64. See: Eugene R. Dattel, "Cotton and The Civil War", *Mississippi Historical Society,* (http://mshistorynow.mdah.state.ms.us/articles/291/cotton-and-the-civil-war) (accessed April 2, 2018).
[53] By 1874, there were only two cotton spinning mills, two cotton weaving factories, and one cotton bleaching establishment left. See: *The Graphic*, August 22, 1874, 183.
[54] For Lancashire the 1850's had saw unprecedented growth within the local cotton industry. Local populations had doubled, and a recession was on the horizon. When the Civil War broke out followed by a decline in cotton exports, Britain believed that due to its significant cotton stockpile that it could hold out until the war was over. However, by 1862 Lancashire's cotton mills were being closed and workers laid off. As a result, one-third of the families in the town were needing governmental relief. See, in chronological order: W. O. Henderson, *The Lancashire Cotton Famine: 1861-65*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1934), 122; Brian Jenkins, *Britain and the War for the Union Vol. One*, (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974), 166-68; D. A. Farnie, *The English Cotton Industry and the World Market 1815-1896*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1979), 135-170.
[55] *Belfast News-Letter*, October 31, 1861.

The advantages of the cotton blockade were not lost on the local press that carried numerous articles regarding Ulster's linen industry and the Belfast Linen Trade circulars.[56] The then Chancellor of the Exchequer William Gladstone noted that the "… Irish economy was partially balanced by the favourable condition of the linen manufacture [in Ulster]".[57] Subsequent scholars such as W. H. Crawford have attributed the Ulster linen boom in the 1860s to the American Civil War.[58] Contemporaries, too, noted the positive consequences of the war. The Presbyterian Revd J. B. Armour, for example:

> It "is an ill wind that blows nobody good", saith the old proverb, and certainly if the American war has been almost the ruination of the cotton trade it has certainly opened a way for the extension of the flax trade which is one and only thing keeping the small Irish farmer from poverty and starvation.[59]

The turnaround from 1859 was remarkable. By 1862, Belfast had earned the nickname "Linenopolis", and had become the epicentre of the globe's linen industry.[60] The American Civil War and the increased demand for Irish linen brought a period of prosperity to the town, which was also further strengthened by increased immigration from Ulster's hinterland. Yet, the impact of the war was not all positive.

A notable effect was the destruction of the hand loom cotton weaving industry. The impact was so severe that from 1862 to 1863 over 20 thousand weavers and 80 thousand muslin embroiderers, who worked within a ten-mile radius of Belfast, were left

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[56] *Belfast News-Letter*, January 4, 1861; *Ulster Observer*, October 9, 1862; November 6, 1862; *Northern Whig*, October 29, 1862.
[57] Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 3d Ser., CLXX, 207-9.
[58] Crawford, *Domestic Linen Industry*, 158.
[59] Letter to J. Megaw from Armour, 29 August 1863, Papers of Rev. J. B. Armour. D1792/A/2/10, P.R.O.N.I. Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[60] E. Boyle, ""Linenopolis": the rise of the textile industry", in *Belfast: Origins and Growth of an Industrial City*, ed. by J. C. Beckett and Robin E. Glasscock, (Belfast: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1987), 43-4.

unemployed.[61] The high unemployment levels led to many immigrating to America, with the Lisburn relief committee sending 253 people to New York and 137 to Philadelphia.[62] The significant impact on the area's cotton industry was reported around the United Kingdom, with comparisons also made with the Lancashire cotton famine.[63] The economic distress was so severe that comments were made in the 1863 parliamentary budget report that Irish distress was worse than the highly publicised conditions seen in Lancashire.[64]

The American civil war thus had positive and negative impacts on the Belfast economy. Against this mixed economic picture, abolitionism continued to attract positive commentary in the local press, with constant demands for the abolition of slavery in America.

1861-65: Abolitionism, hierarchy, Civil War and the charge of Hypocrisy

The pro-abolitionists in Belfast tended to throw their support behind the Union in the Civil War, but this backing was not unconditional. The Union was at times criticised and accused of hypocrisy. Such criticism could flow from Irish émigré experience in the US or from the actions of the Union army on the high seas. Belfast abolitionists viewed the American civil war through the prism of their history under the penal code and the tensions surrounding tenant rights.

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[61] Hugh McCall, *The Cotton Famine of 1862-63, with some sketches of the Proceedings of the Lisburn Relief Committee*, (Belfast: William Mullan and Son, 1872), 28, quoted in Hernon, *Celts, Catholics and* Copperheads, 7.
[62] McCall, *Cotton Famine*, 28, quoted in Hernon, *Celts, Catholics and* Copperheads, 7.
[63] *Bury Free Press*, July 18, 1863: *Walsall Free Press and General Advertiser*, July 18, 1863.
[64] Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3d Ser. 356 vols.: London, 1830-91. CLXX, 207-9. For more information regarding the Lancashire cotton famine and its effects see, in chronological order: R. Arthur Arnold, *The History of the Cotton Famine: From the Fall of Sumter to the Passing of the Public Works Act*, (London: Saunders, Otley, and Company, 1864); Mary Ellison, *Support for Secession: Lancashire and the American Civil War*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); Jenkins, *Britain and the War*, 166-68; D. A. Farnie, *The English Cotton Industry and the World Market 1815-1896*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); John K. Walton, *A Social History of Lancashire, 1558-1939*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).

In January 1861 an editorial in the *Whig* recounted the escape of a slave into Canada.[65] The story centred on the slave's murder of a slavecatcher who had attempted to restrain him and return him to slavery in the US:

> [The slave] was demanded under the Extradition Treaty, as a murderer. The Canadian Courts seem to have difficulty in coming to a decision. Murderers they are bound to give up; but not fugitive slaves. But as the murder was simply an incident, and necessary means, of escape, it is clear, we should have thought, that it does not bring the perpetrator of it within the Extradition Treaty.[66]

The article is sympathetic to the fugitive slave, whose actions are condoned. Slavery was seen to be a more heinous crime than the murder of a slave catcher. Here the *Whig* prioritised the idea of personal liberty, a key theme in Irish Presbyterian thought.[67]

There were also similarities between the critique of Ireland's hierarchical society from the point of view of personal liberty, and the attack on slavery in the Southern states, themselves traditional hierarchical societies dominated by land and plantation owners.[68] Inherited memories of the penal era and the tension surrounding the continuing tenant right campaigns in Belfast promoted both liberty and abolitionism in the context of the American civil war.[69]

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[65] *Northern Whig*, January 4, 1861.
[66] Ibid., January 4, 1861.
[67] For more information on liberty being a key theme in Presbyterian ideology see, in chronological order: Kevin Herlihy, *The Politics of Irish Dissent: 1650-1800*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 75; Barry Sloan, *Writers and Protestantism in the North of Ireland: Heirs to Adamnation?*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000), 66; Eugenio F. Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876-1906*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 27.
[68] For discussion regarding the Southern States being a hierarchical society see, in chronological order: Glenn Feldman, *The Disfranchisement Myth: Poor Whites and Suffrage Restriction in Alabama*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Rebecca Fraser, *Gender, Race and Family in Nineteenth Century America: From Northern Woman to Plantation Mistress*, (New York: Springer, 2012).
[69] Burrus M. Carnahan, *Act of Justice: Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the Law of War*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007); Bertrand Russell, *Freedom and Organization*, (London: Routledge, 2009), 259.

Belief in liberty drove Belfast abolitionism and produced backing for the Union in the American civil war, but also critiqued if deficiencies in Union policy were perceived. There was some impatience expressed in December 1861, for example, when the *Morning News* noted that the Union government still had no "fixed policy upon the slave question– the very base of all adjustment."[70] The case for complete abolition of slavery dominated local headlines.[71] The appeal of liberty in Belfast was reinforced by the correspondence with Irish emigres in the United States.[72] Overall, from the perspective of Belfast, the Northern States represented a more democratic, egalitarian society, but still flawed.

Draft Riots and the Trent Affair

A more critical stance towards the Union government was taken in Belfast in July 1863 in reaction to the New York Draft riots.[73] That March, President Lincoln passed a national conscription law.[74] Chosen by a lottery, the names of the first men drafted into the Union army were announced in July. Tensions were already high in this period due to the rules surrounding the avoidance of the draft whereby a man could hire a substitute who would

[70] *Belfast Morning News*, December 9, 1861.
[71] *Northern Whig*, June 22, 1863; December 29, 1862; *Belfast Morning News*, October 21, 1863; October 13, 1862.
[72] Extracts from the diary kept by J. B. Hamilton. January 10, 1860. D1518/1/5, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland; Correspondence to and from W.J.C. Allen, May 28, 1860, D1558/1/1/31, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland; Rowland Redmond New York to William Young, November 7, 1862, D1364/I/19A, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland; Letter from William Moore, New York, September 22, 1861, D877/15, P.R.O.N.I., Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[73] For further information on the Draft Riots see, in chronological order: Adrian Cook, *The Armies of the Streets: The New York City Draft Riots of 1863*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1974); Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Leslie M. Harris, *In the shadow of slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
[74] John G. Zinn, *The Mutinous Regiment: The Thirty-third New Jersey in the Civil War*, (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2005), 7. For information regarding the Draft Act see: Eugene C. Murdock, *One Million Men: The Civil War Draft in the North*, (Madison*:* The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1971).

serve in his place, or simply pay $300 to avoid service.[75] As a result, the war was thought of as a "rich man's war, poor-man's fight".[76]

In mid-July tensions surrounding the draft spilled over into violent disturbances in Lower Manhattan. The majority of those involved were of the Irish working class, who worried that free blacks were now competing against them in the unskilled labour market. Contributing to these fears was the anger surrounding wealthier men being able to afford the $300 dollar fine to avoid the draft. The riot, which started due to frustration at the lack of opportunities and anger at the Union's draft system, soon turned into a race riot with Irish immigrants taking out their frustrations on the city's African-Americans. There have been numerous historical discussions surrounding the cause of the riots and the involvement of so many Irish immigrants. The general consensus is that Irish involvement was due to unskilled Irish immigrants being in direct competition with free blacks regarding employment:

> …the Democratic Party had warned New York's Irish and German residents to prepare for the emancipation of slaves and the resultant labor competition when southern blacks would supposedly flee north. To these New Yorkers, the Emancipation Proclamation was confirmation of their worst fears.[77]

The involvement of the Irish was complex, as they did not riot due to being 'Irish', but rather due to their mistreatment in the US under the Union government. Joseph Hernon has observed that Irish emigrant fears of slave emancipation was the result of fear of black labour competition and the hypocrisy of US abolitionists who were blind to white wage slavery in the Northern States – which primarily affected Irish immigrants.[78] Basil Lee has

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[75] John M. Sacher, '"A Soldier's Life Is a Hard One at Best": Soldiers in the American Civil War', in *Civil War: People and Perspectives*, ed. by Lisa Tendrich Frank, (Santa Barbra: ABC Clio LLC, 2009), 13.
[76] David Williams, *Rich Man's War: Class. Caste and Confederate Defeat in the Lower Chattahoochee Valley*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press,1998), 4.
[77] Harris, *In the shadow of slavery*, 247-262.
[78] Hernon, *Celts, Catholics and Copperheads*, 20-21.

argued that being Irish had no bearing on involvement in the riots. Lee argued that it was "not the Irish as Irish who revolted, but the penniless Irish labourer who saw his life thrown away in a cause, abolition, in which he had no interest".[79] Either way, the draft and the subsequent lottery brought to the surface tensions surrounding fears which already existed before 1863.

In Britain, attention concentrated on the fact that many of the rioters were Irish:

> The great mass of the ruffians…were, I need hardly say, Irish…The hunting down and murder of inoffensive negroes was done by a pack of savages who come here in search of liberty and equality, and who…seem to take fiendish delight in making another race taste all its bitterness in America.[80]

The *London Daily News* was not alone in its criticism.[81] The Scottish press, while not as harsh in criticising the extent of Irish involvement, did report that a "considerable proportion of the mob had as their main object theft and robbery".[82] In Ireland condemnation of the riots was commonplace, alongside criticism of the draft in which the rich were able to buy an exemption.[83]Yet, Irish immigrants received more sympathetic treatment, with excuses sometimes given for their actions.[84] If anything, the New York draft riots demonstrated the pro-Confederate sympathies of the Irish in other parts of Ireland (not Belfast), with many opposing the draft since it was first announced. Unsurprisingly, the most support in Ireland for the Irish rioters came from the country's nationalists who had the closest ties to the Irish in New York.[85]

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[79] Basil Leo Lee, *Discontent in New York City, 1861-1865*, (New York: Catholic University of America Press, 1943), 105.
[80] *London Daily News*, July 28, 1863.
[81] *Globe*, July 28, 1863; *Birmingham Daily Post*, July 28, 1863; *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, July 28, 1863; *Times*, August 1, 1863.
[82] *Caledonian Mercury*, July 29, 1863.
[83] *Freemans Journal*, July 28, 1863.
[84] *Cork Examiner*, July 29, 1863.
[85] Hernon, *Celts, Catholics and Copperheads*, 22.

In Belfast, which had a strong unionist element in the nineteenth century – and which had long seen identity issues surrounding being 'British' or 'Irish' – opinions regarding the draft riots were somewhat surprising as the town's press did not take the same view of Irish involvement as Britain's press, despite the 'British' sentiment within the town. Instead, local opinion was more aligned with that of the Irish press with the majority of the town's press ignoring the role of Irish immigrants in the violence, condoning the accused, and placing blame on New York's German immigrants.[86] The town's press was torn as it did not wish to criticise the Irish involved but nor could it ignore the abuse of New York's African Americans. Belfast's long-held anti-slavery sensitivities meant many were disgusted at the abuse of New York's African-Americans during the riots.[87] In one article the *Whig* criticised an address of the Irish born New York Archbishop John Hughes. Hughes' address while critical of the riots did not mention the ill treatment of the African-Americans:

> [His grace's avoidance of] all reference to the brutalities inflicted by the populace on the miserable negro inhabitants of the city—several of whom had been murdered in cold blood, and all of whom had been exposed to cruel ill usage by the rioters. We expressed our astonishment that a Christian bishop, in such circumstances, should not even by faintest inuendo, strive to excite one impulse of human compassion on behalf of the persecuted, down trodden race, who were the special objects of brutality on the part of his bearers…[88]

In cases where the press could not deny the involvement of Irish immigrants, a distinction was drawn between Irishmen and those that were involved in the mob:

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[86] *Banner of Ulster*, August 1, 1863.
[87] *Belfast News-Letter*, July 29, 1863; July 30, 1863; *Belfast Morning News*, July 30, 1863; *Northern Whig*, July 28, 1863.
[88] *Northern Whig*, August 19, 1863.

> …we personally know many Irish Catholics who are as loyal, as law-abiding, and as hostile to all to all manner of outrage as any men on earth…the industrious, sober, intelligent Irish – of whom there are thousands…indignantly declined all participation in the crimes of the grog-shop rowdies and ruffians who have done their worst to disgrace the Irish name.[89]

In the Belfast press sympathy for the Irish in New York coexisted with continuing condemnations of slavery. Ultimately blame was placed on the Union government in the lead up to the draft riots. Readers were also reminded of the sacrifices made by Irish soldiers who fought for the Union government. The actions of the rioters in New York were considered less important than the conduct of thousands of pro-Union Irish soldiers in the war against the South. The heroic actions of the Union's Irish soldiers, such as those in Thomas Francis Meagher's Irish Brigade (in which the majority was made up of Irish soldiers from New York), were used to brush over Irish involvement in the draft riots.[90]

The complicated issues surrounding Irish history, personal liberty and the Civil War were all woven in Belfast responses to the Draft riots. This could result in criticism in Belfast of the Union's presumed superiority. Such reactions were evident in local coverage of the *Trent* affair, in which the Union frigate *San Jacinto* intercepted the Royal Mail Packet *Trent* on the high seas. Officers on the *San Jacinto* boarded and removed two Confederate diplomats from the British ship, which caused a major diplomatic crisis.[91] A number of

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[89] *Northern Whig*, August 7, 1863.
[90] Hernon, *Celts, Catholics and Copperheads*, 17-21, 121. Thomas Francis Meagher was an Irish nationalist and leader of the Young Irelanders before he was transported to Australia. He then escaped to the US in 1852. For more information on Meagher and the Civil War's Irish Brigades see, in chronological order: Joseph G. Bilby, *The Irish Brigade In The Civil War: The 69th New York and Other Irish Regiments of The Army Of The Potomac*, (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1997); Russ. A. Pritchard, *The Irish Brigade*, (New York: Perseus Books, 2004); Paul R. Wily, *The Irish General: Thomas Francis Meagher*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007); Daniel M. Callaghan, *Thomas Francis Meagher and the Irish Brigade in the Civil War*, (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011).
[91] *London Evening Standard*, November 27, 1861; November 28, 1861; *Kerry Evening Post*, November 27, 1861; *Dublin Daily Express*, November 28, 1861; *Irish Times*, November 28, 1861; Duncan Andrew Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War*, (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 20013), 61-95; Alfred Grant, *The American Civil War and the British Press*, (London: McFarland, 2000), 67-74.

Belfast newspapers commented on the *boarding*: "England is on the brink of war with the Federal States of America", with the *News-Letter* claiming that the seizure of the Confederate diplomats (James Mason and John Slidell) was "as illegal as it was insolent".[92] The *Belfast Weekly News* additionally argued that Britain must either challenge this act by the United States or "abandon forever our boasted sovereignty of the seas".[93] The Catholic *Morning News* also backed the British government.[94] The *Trent* affair produced serious tensions between the British government and the Union. Richard Huzzey had observed that one of the reasons for Britain's lacklustre support for the North in the Civil War was due to the actions of the Union during the *Trent* affair.[95]

An earlier study has claimed that Belfast press articles – primarily in the *News-Letter* – which criticised the Union during the war signified a level of sympathy and support for the Southern States during the war.[96] This is mistaken. In Belfast criticism of the Union was separated from abolitionism. In a town with a deep history of rights and liberty, the overriding support was for abolitionism. In the *Trent* affair the Belfast press felt that the Union government had overstepped the mark by boarding a British ship, but this never equated to support for the Southern states. In some respects, the response in Belfast contrasted to that elsewhere in Ireland.

Joseph Hernon has previously observed that in this period Catholic unionists in Ireland were caught in a severe predicament: how to support both Irish unionists and Catholic nationalists.[97] The tension in this dilemma was seen within Belfast's press with the Catholic *Morning News* backing the British in the affair,[98] with the newspaper going so far as to call the *San Jacinto* a "piratical frigate".[99] However this opinion was not shared in Dublin where a meeting of nationalists supported America, due to it being "a nation that had

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[92] *Belfast News-Letter*, November 28, 1861.
[93] *Belfast Weekly News*, November 30, 1861.
[94] *Belfast Morning News*, December 3, 1861; December 18, 1861; December 19, 1861.
[95] Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, 22.
[96] Carroll, 'Belfast and the American Civil War', 245-260.
[97] Hernon, Jr. *Celts, Catholics & Copperheads*, 47
[98] *Belfast Morning News*, November 29, 1861; December 2, 1861; December 5, 1861.
[99] Ibid., December 9, 1861.

befriended them…that had opened to them, a hospitable refuge" with Britain seen as "nation that had levelled their homes…[and] denied to them even now the ordinary rights of manhood."[100] The *Whig*, also aware of the growing tensions between unionists and nationalists in Ireland, argued that the bellicose pro-Union articles seen within the nationalist Dublin based newspaper, the *Nation,* not be taken seriously, believing the people of Ireland should not be identified "with the sentiments of the *Nation* newspaper".[101]

The tensions surrounding the *Trent* affair highlighted the complexity of Belfast abolitionism in relation to the American civil war. There was support for the Union's aims in emancipating slaves, but also criticism when the Union government was seen as contradicting just law. The complications of the relationship between Britain and Ireland could also intervene.

Criticism of the North: inherited memories and hypocrisy

Disagreement over acts committed by the Union (Federal government) during the War should not be mistaken for support for the Confederacy and the Slave States. Local support of abolition did not necessarily mean supporting every action taken by the Federal Government. Richard Huzzey has discussed the complications of Britain's own support of the Union, observing that Confederate sympathizers preyed upon the perceptions of slavery being a national American crime rather than a sectional crime confined only to the Southern States.[102] In January 1864, the *Whig* published an article in which it mocked the Federal States for pretending that, in contrast to the Confederacy, it had never mistreated blacks:

> The "North" is in one sweeping condemnation. It is found guilty, on both counts, of past brutality and present hypocrisy. Possibly the chroniclers of the Federal States have been forgetful. Was there ever actually an enactment of Illinois State that

[100] *Evening Freeman*, December 6, 1861; *Irishman*, December 7, 1861; *Belfast Morning News*, December 9, 1861.
[101] *Northern Whig*, December 30, 1861.
[102] Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, 29.

> negroes could hold real property!...Were they ever excluded from the jury-box. Have they been penned off, apart from other worshippers, in the Christian Churches of the North? Did American Democracy any time refuse to share with them its fraternal suffrages? Did it denounce their inky complexion as an incurable leprosy? Did It kick them out of the mail coach and railway carriage? Has it treated them that their numbers have declined in the North while multiplying the South? Yes.[103]

In similar vein in 1861 the *Mercury* noted the hypocrisy of the Union in claiming the Civil War as a war between Slavery and Freedom:

> We have exposed this fallacy over and over again…We have often explained the Negro is just as much a pariah- indeed far more so- in the North than in the South…In the South there is no hypocrisy… and no false pretences are employed. The doctrine is boldly proclaimed the Negro is an inferior animal…No matter how untrue and detestable we may consider this doctrine, we cannot deny the praise of candour…[104]

While in general the Belfast press backed the Union over the Confederacy, there was significant criticism of the North's hypocrisy, claiming to be on the side of liberty while ignoring its role in the development of the American slave system.[105] Here we see again the role of local historical memory in framing the charge of hypocrisy.

End of the American Civil War: Ireland's long running theme of liberty

The battle against the penal laws in the eighteenth-century left a long tradition of libertarian thought in Ireland. The seventeenth-century Irish philosopher William Molyneux had

[103] *Northern Whig*, January 29, 1864.
[104] *Belfast Mercury*, August 9, 1861.
[105] Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005).

praised "liberty as the inherent right for mankind".[106] In this battle for liberty many commentators likened the position of the Irish to slaves. The mind-set of liberty, shared by Catholics and Presbyterians, underpinned several critiques of the Federal government during the Civil War:

> …Presbyterian and Catholic creeds, [while] two religious adversaries, proceed from two principles directly opposed to each other, the first from liberty, the second from authority…[107]

There were several negative perceptions of the Confederate states in the contemporary Belfast press. An article of 1864, for example, discussed a group formed in the Confederate army whose primary job was look after coloured troops and "refuse quarter to all negroes with whom they come in contact". The newspaper responded: "It is hard to believe that a commanding officer…would sanction any such vindictive organisation".[108] A further article reported confederate prisoners being driven almost to madness as the result of being guarded by a regiment of black soldiers. One soldier, a former slave, having seen his old master to be one of the prisoners offered the man ten dollars. The paper commented "you may imagine the effect of such an offer on the captured planter".[109]

Perceptions of the Irish as slaves continued into the American Civil War period. Irish Catholics were described as slaves in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[110] In 1862 the Catholic *Observer* declared that the "Catholics of this province, and we say it without offence, are still an enslaved people".[111] A letter noted in the same vein: "…your

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[106] William Molyneux, *The Case of Ireland's Being Bound by Acts of Parliament in England, Stated*, (Dublin: J. Almon & M. Hingeston, 1698), 3.
[107] This comment was made by Gustave August Beaumont, a French magistrate who visited Ireland in the nineteenth century. See: Gustave Auguste Beaumont, *Ireland*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 239.
[108] *Belfast Morning News*, May 24, 1864.
[109] Ibid., May 24, 1864.
[110] *Northern Whig*, October 1, 1850; *Northern Star*, January 4, 1792.
[111] *Ulster Observer*, July 1, 1862.

correspondent was born a slave, under the free and enlightened government of England- that nation that feels, or pretends to feel, sympathy for the oppressed of every climate…"[112] The accusation of hypocrisy towards British abolitionists from Belfast's Catholics remains in evidence at this time.[113] As did the complex emotions surrounding 'liberty', the Union and the Confederacy.

Reactions in Belfast to the close of the American Civil War were complex and subtle, and did not engage in triumphalism. Here the measured critique of the North evident above no doubt played its part.[114] When it became clear that the war was reaching its conclusion after successive Confederate losses,[115] the Belfast press even demonstrated some sympathy with the Confederacy and the passion that it had shown throughout the war:

> The most determined enemy of the Southerns will acknowledge the defiant the indomitable resolution, and the brilliant ability with which they have, for so far, carried on the contest; the most enthusiastic of their admirers must admit that, according to present appearances, that skill, valour, and determination have been employed in vain, and that the time is at hand when the war-game, grown desperate, can be played no longer… whatever may be thought of the cause of the Southerns — of the quarrel in which they have struggled long and suffered fearfully —it must owned that they have maintained it with a bravery and ability worthy of the noblest hearts and loftiest object…[116]

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[112] *Ulster Observer*, July 15, 1862.
[113] *Ulster Mercury*, April 19, 1854; November 10, 1858.
[114] *Belfast News-Letter*, December 20, 1864.
[115] On April 2, the Confederate Capitol Richmond, VA., was abandoned by the Confederacy following the Confederate loss in Petersburg and death of Confederate General Ambrose P. Hill. See: A. Wilson Greene, *The Final Battles of the Petersburg Campaign: Breaking the Backbone of the Rebellion*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008); Ron Field, *Petersburg 1864–65: The longest siege*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).
[116] *Belfast Morning News*, April 7, 1865.

This sympathy was not full support for the South,[117] for there was also the belief that Union victory came from being on the side of the better cause, anti-slavery: "If the Federals triumph, they may attribute it to their better cause, their greater power, [and] their innumerable material advantages…"[118] The strength of Belfast abolitionism meant that the town would not support the Confederacy, despite some respect for its tenacity:

> From the commencement of the armed secession our expectation was, that when the seceders found themselves sinking before the greater force the North, they would free the slaves, and let them loose on the enemy. Now, if ever, is the time for such a policy; but the slaveowners are unwilling. The expediency of such a course has been long debated; and at length the slaves are employed in the war; but how? As slaves! They are not emancipated; nor is there held out to them any generous hope of freeing themselves and their race from bondage, by helping to free their masters and white countrymen from the power of the North. This the result of the contest between those Southerns who preferred the cause, and those who preferred slavery. The "institution" has been the weak point in the cause the South all through; and now promises to be fatal.[119]

Following the end of the war in May 1865, reaction in Belfast, as in the national press, focused upon the death of Lincoln and the attempted assassination of Secretary of State William H. Seward.[120] In Belfast, numerous articles expressed sympathy for Lincoln and his family. There was also a large meeting in Lincoln's honour that discussed sending

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[117] *Belfast Mercury,* August 9, 1861.
[118] *Belfast Morning News,* April 7, 1865.
[119] Ibid., April 7, 1865.
[120] A plan was made to assassinate the Vice President Andrew Johnson; however it was not carried out. See, in chronological order: John M. Taylor, *William Henry Seward: Lincoln's Right Hand*, (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1991); Benjamin King, *A Bullet for Lincoln,* (Gretna, LA.: Pelican Publishing, 1993); Edward Steers, *Blood on the Moon: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2001); Walter Stahr, *Seward: Lincoln's Indispensable Man*. (Simon & Schuster, 2012).

sympathies to Lincoln's widow and the American people.[121] There was subsequently much press coverage in Belfast of the hunt and executions of Lincoln and Seward's assassins. There was also some discussion of the finer details surrounding the Southern loss, such as the legalities surrounding the secessionists and reconstruction.[122]

That there existed criticism of the Confederacy and such animosity for slavery contradicts the argument of Dr John Young (the focal point of Carrol's analysis) who argued that Belfast's press displayed a "painfully strong "partiality for the South.""[123] Using Young's papers and the *News-Letter*'s sympathetic articles for the Confederacy, Carroll leads the reader to believe that the *Belfast News-Letter* was the most significant newspaper in this period. Carroll cites the *News-Letter* and its sympathetic articles for the Confederacy to assert that Belfast was largely pro-confederate:

> Only the Radical newspaper the *Northern Whig* and, in Young's judgement, the Ulster working class were consistently supportive of the Union and the right of the Federal government to suppress the rebellion of the Southern states.[124]

However, one has to take a broader range of the local press into account, and also examine circulation figures. The *News-Letter* was not representative of the majority of the town's press or population. In 1860, the *News-Letter* was selling 400 copies a day.[125] The abolitionist and pro-Union *Morning News* was selling on average 10,000 each day alone.[126] The *Northern Whig*, also abolitionist and pro-Union, was selling substantially more than the

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[121] *Belfast News-Letter*, May 3, 1865.
[122] Reconstruction was the period from the end of the civil war in 1865 until 1877, during which the South was absorbed back into the Union. See, in chronological order: William Archibald Dunning, *Reconstruction: Political & Economic, 1865–1877*, (New York: Harper and Brothers,1877); John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction After the Civil War,* Second Edition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865–1898*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).
[123] Carroll, 'Belfast and the American Civil War', 247.
[124] Ibid., 256.
[125] Count taken in 1860. See: Appendix 2.
[126] Average sold copies from quarterly stamp return figures. Count taken in 1858. See: Appendix 2.

News-Letter with daily sales of over 1700 copies.[127] The evidence does not support Young's claim. There was, as noted above, some criticism of the Union and some respect for the tenacity of the South in the broader press, but overall Belfast abolitionism rejected the slave states of the Confederacy and backed the Union. Here anti-slave considerations were central in determining Belfast reactions: "The "institution" has been the weak point in the cause in the South all through; and now promises to be fatal."[128]

The Belfast press was vocal in its abhorrence of Southern slavery, including accusations that the Slave States wanted to revive the African Slave trade.[129] The *News-Letter* reprinted an article from the *New York Herald*, declaring that several Americans were transporting slaves from Africa to the US.[130] While Belfast newspapers were often at times critical of the Union government, this was not support for the South. Far from it. There was far more derision of the Confederacy, and its slave system.[131]

Conclusion

Belfast's economy was greatly affected by the Civil War after 1862, with a linen boom and a cotton decline. Abolitionism in Belfast in the context of the US civil war was not however tied to these economic fortunes. Long standing beliefs in liberty, and the particular local historic struggles, conditioned perceptions of the US civil war in Belfast. Abolitionism was not simply unconditional support for the North. Its own role in the establishment of slavery was criticised, and in events like the *Trent* affair, Belfast abolitionists backed the British. In the Draft riots of 1863, Irish concerns could take precedence over abolitionism. The Union government in America was also brought to heel for its shortcomings over liberty, in that it did not, for example, understand or pursue 'true' abolition (equality). This was also

[127] This count was taken in 1858. See: Appendix 2.
[128] *Belfast Morning News*, April 7, 1865.
[129] Ibid., January 2, 1861; *Northern Whig*, February 15, 1859.
[130] *Belfast News-Letter*, August 25, 1859.
[131] Ibid., January 22, 1864; *Northern Whig*, December 31, 1863; January 18, 1864; January 20, 1864; *Belfast News-Letter*, December 23, 1863.

apparent, in the view from Belfast, in the mistreatment of Irish immigrants. Hence the charge of hypocrisy, so popular at this time.

Carroll observes that US Consul John Young believed that a significant amount in Belfast's population supported the Southern States in the War. The facts do not support this. Abolition and unconditional support for the Union were not one and the same, so the Belfast press could be vocal in criticising a Union that was also guilty of mistreatment towards African Americans, be it runaway slaves, freed slaves and free blacks. The central concern of the Belfast press was the mistreatment of slaves, or the US breaking perceived rules such as those of the high seas. Overall the local press preferred the Union and criticised the Confederacy. Belfast abolitionism was as strong as in the past.

Conclusion

This study has been the first to attempt a longitudinal study of abolitionist agitation in Belfast from its origins in the eighteenth century and its durability through much local, national, and international change, into the late nineteenth century. This periodization enables an examination of Belfast abolitionism during an era of significant economic and social change from that of a small Presbyterian town in the eighteenth century to being Ireland's pre-eminent industrial city in the late nineteenth century.[1] The research has demonstrated that Belfast's anti-slavery outlooks were complex and related to the effects of many issues, with the most formative being the impact of the penal laws in the eighteenth century. The main conclusions therefore relate to continuity and change in Belfast abolitionism. We will first note the importance of the Irish as slave theme, from its inception in the eighteenth century to it still being in evidence in reactions in Belfast to the American Civil War in the 1860s. We will then outline the main points of evolution in Belfast abolitionism. Finally, we will discuss the influence of national campaigns on Belfast anti-slavery activity.

Anti-slavery agitation first arose in Belfast amidst the rise in tensions between Ireland's Catholics and Dissenters and the British and Irish governments as a result of the penal laws. In the 1770s the national campaign was often discussed by the Belfast press.[2] It was felt that the Irish had been deprived of their 'natural rights'. This perception fed into the discussions of slavery. Edith Mary Johnston stated: "The operation of the penal code created on a religious basis what was in many ways a typical colonial situation…During the eighteenth-century colour and slavery were not the only badges and methods by which a small minority kept a small majority in subjection."[3] In Belfast, commentary on the abuse of African slaves invited comparisons with their own situation. Such comparisons were often

[1] Lewis, *Carson*, 15.
[2] Such as the 1772 Somerset case which attracted national attention.
[3] Johnston, *Ireland*, 19.

through the prism of enlightenment understandings of liberty and natural rights. The view of the Irish as slave, albeit not at the extreme on a scale of slavery, took root, with the Irish being described as wearing a "Badge of Slavery".[4] While this sentiment may have been hyperbolic or even unjustified, it was nonetheless current, with contemporaries describing the Irish as slaves. Certainly the Belfast press used slave metaphors in regard to the Irish experience. This, coupled with the growth in egalitarianism as a consequence of the impact of the Scottish Enlightenment upon Ireland's Presbyterians, made abolitionism a popular cause in Belfast, especially amongst the New-Lighters (Unitarians) belonging to the town's merchant class. In Belfast, the enlightenment themes of liberty, natural rights and equality remained pillars of anti-slavery outlooks throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In the early nineteenth century, the Irish slave mentalité became fractured along religious lines. This was in part due to the benefits seen in the town as a result of the 1801 Act of Union. In the 1780s and 90s, for liberal Presbyterians the relationship between Ireland and Britain was flawed. Following 1801 many supported the Union as it was seen to bring great prosperity to the town and its industries.[5] However, while the town's Presbyterians saw benefits from the Union, Ireland's Catholics had not received the emancipation promised by William Pitt the Younger. Catholics now found themselves isolated by not supporting the Union. Also contributing to the divide was the growing fear of the Catholic Church due to the possibility of Catholic emancipation (granted in 1829) being successful, alongside a significant increase in the local Catholic population, with many migrating from Ulster's hinterlands. These events produced an increase in sectarianism. Yet, despite these rising tensions, the Irish as slave theme continued to be a bulwark of Belfast abolitionism.

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[4] The impact of the Test Act on Ulster's Presbyterians is still the subject of on-going dispute among Irish historians. For more information see in chronological order: Ian McBride, 'Presbyterians in the Penal Era', *Bullán,* 1, (1994): 73-86; J. C. Beckett, *Protestant Dissent in Ireland 1687-1780,* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009). In relation to the Irish wearing a 'Badge of Slavery' see Abernathy, *Scarce and valuable tracts*.

[5] Ollerenshaw, *Banking,* 1-3; Tierney, *Accommodating National Identity,* 234.

In the lead up to the 1807 Slave Trade Act, there were numerous articles and poems published in the Belfast press. Criticism from all of the town's denominations, Presbyterian, Quaker and Catholic, issued from the belief that all men were entitled to liberty and natural rights, and to deny them was inhumane and unchristian. This fervour was sustained to the complete abolishment of the British slave system in 1838, following local abolitionists campaigning to end the apprenticeship system. Despite a rise in 'Britishness' in Belfast, criticism still remained of the hierarchical system (the Ascendancy) and treatment of the Irish. This was seen during the tenant rights campaign in the 1830-1850s. Similar accusations were also seen during and after the famine, with some arguing that during the famine the Irish were treated worse than the American slaves. While slaves were treated as commodities, they were at least fed to protect their owner's investment. This further reinforced the nineteenth century Irish slave mentalité, with slavery seen as an evil to be eradicated as much at home as elsewhere.

Belfast abolitionist reaction to the American Civil War has not been studied in the context of the town's long tradition of anti-slavery agitation nor under the influence of the Irish slave mentalité. The major examination of this topic, by Francis Carroll, argued that in Belfast there was more support and encouragement for the Confederacy. This thesis has demonstrated that this is not wholly correct. The perceived connection between the American slaves and the Irish would be the deciding factor that prevented backing for the Confederacy really taking off in Belfast. There was significant local criticism of the Union/Federal government for acting with arrogant superiority and of some hypocrisy. The Union's treatment of Irish émigrés prior to and during the draft riots further added to local criticism of the North. Similarly, the treatment of the British ship the *Trent* by the Union was also roundly condemned. There was some local respect for the Confederacy for its bravery and honesty. However, the fact remains that overall, Belfast abolitionism was so strong that there was little chance of the Belfast press throwing itself behind the Confederacy. The *Whig*, for example, declared: "If slavery cannot be peaceably and gradually extinguished let

it be violently abolished."[6] Scholars have frequently commented on the importance of the press, with Aiken McClelland declaring newspapers to be "a mirror of the age."[7] Throughout the war, Belfast's press frequently criticised the slave system within the Southern States, believing that the Union, while arrogant, had a better cause. Local abolitionism which was evident in the town's most popular newspapers the *Morning News* and the *Whig* renders any claim that Belfast was pro-confederate false. The town's publications were in fact united in support of liberty and the abolition of slavery.

This study has established that Belfast abolitionism evolved over the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century the cause drew support from the town's liberal Presbyterians. The nineteenth century witnessed some conservatives joining the cause. By the 1830s, local politics was actually dictated, for a time, by the town's abolitionists, with the Belfast Anti-Slavery Society (BASS) only nominating abolitionists for MP. The establishment in 1830 of the BASS with intense public support was a significant development. Its establishment brought previously individual groups together. The BASS became the centre of local anti-slavery agitation. It increased confidence in local campaigning, evident in the lead up to the abolishment of the slavery in 1833 and apprenticeship in 1838. Success in these campaigns gave an added boost to Belfast abolitionism that drew support across denominations. No longer were Presbyterians the only denomination visibly supportive of the abolition of slavery. From the 1810s the town's Quakers and Catholics also increased their anti-slavery agitation with some being active participants in the BASS. The 1830s also saw the establishment of Belfast's first Quaker and Catholic newspapers that carried abolitionist articles and features. The growth in Belfast's industries and national recognition as a town with prominent abolitionist support attracted a number of visits in the 1840s from American abolitionists and former slaves. The involvement of Belfast women was more prominent in this period, though they had also

[6] *Northern Whig*, October 8, 1862.
[7] McClelland, 'The Ulster Press', 92.

been vocal in their support for abolition in the 1810s and 30s. Abolitionism in Belfast was undoubtedly popular, although it could be overshadowed by other events.

This study has demonstrated, for example, that during the 1840s the BASS was severely impacted by the consequences of the Free Kirk's actions on the Presbyterian Church of Ireland. This resulted in tension between the BASS and the PCI as the BASS's leadership regularly criticised the Free Kirk, and a fall in support for the BASS. The effects of the famine also heavily impacted on the BASS and the Belfast Ladies' Anti-Slavery Association (BLASA). Support for abolition dropped amongst local Catholic nationalists, for instance, as it was felt that aid for the starving should take precedence over abolitionism. The Catholic newspaper the *Ulsterman* accused the British government of hypocrisy. The BASS never recovered from the blows of the PCI-Free Kirk disputes and the famine. It closed in 1853.

Despite these setbacks, Belfast abolitionism was far from moribund. Indeed, towards the late 1850s Catholic abolitionism was on the rise. The popular Catholic *Belfast Morning News* was supportive of American abolitionists. This reflected sentiment in the Belfast press more broadly with the town's press keenly following the American Civil War with many adopting, for the most part, an abolitionist stance. This was to be the last great cause of Belfast abolitionism.

This thesis has also illustrated the importance of placing Belfast abolitionism in a national context. The Belfast press first started to take note of the national campaign following the famous Somerset case of 1772. Post Somerset, the Belfast press carried frequent updates on the national campaign, such as Wilberforce's attempts to bring a bill to parliament to abolish the British slave trade. Interest in and support of British abolitionism and national campaigns reached even into the town's radical society the United Irishmen. This was despite some criticism of British abolitionism for ignoring the perceived

mistreatment of the Irish while calling for the liberation of African slaves.[8] The link between local and national abolitionism was a continuity over our period.

Belfast abolitionism received prominent coverage in the local press in the run up to the 1807 Slave Trade Act. Following this Act, attention in Belfast focused on the abolition of the entire British slave system. Locals petitioned parliament and took out private subscriptions to the British *Anti-Slavery Reporter*. There was criticism from Belfast of Lord Castlereagh's failure to broker a deal to bring an end to the European slave trade at the Conference of Vienna. Belfast interest and agitation in the national campaign became more prominent following the founding of the BASS in 1830. It became an auxiliary of the national British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS), sending regular communiques about abolitionist activity in Belfast. In 1833, a BASS delegation went to London to support the abolishment of the slave system. In the campaign to abolish the British apprenticeship system, there was clear backing in Belfast for Joseph Sturge's national campaign. Belfast's importance as a growing centre of economic power, and abolitionist protest, was recognised in visits by members of the BFASS in 1840. This raised the prominence of Belfast abolitionism still further. Visits from abolitionists connected to the national and American societies would continue throughout the 1840s. While supportive of the national campaign, Belfast abolitionists could also be critical as, for example, in the *Irish Friend*'s reaction to the national society's refusal to allow female delegates to attend the conference.[9] Belfast Quaker abolitionist outlooks were similar to the British Friends. Belfast Quakers also petitioned parliament and joined anti-slavery societies. There was therefore much local support for national campaigns, but this thesis has noted important differences in motivation. In contrast to the national anti-slavery campaign, Belfast abolitionism was greatly influenced by perceptions of historical mistreatment. This said, there were similarities in the content of agitation. Both local and national campaigns drew upon emotive stories and language. There was strong support in Belfast for British campaigners such as William Wilberforce,

[8] *Belfast News-Letter,* April 3, 1792.
[9] *Irish Friend*, Vol. 3, No. 8, 7.

Granville Sharp and Joseph Sturge. There was some divergence between the Belfast and the British press over the coverage of certain events in the US Civil War. During the Draft Riots, for instance, the British press criticised Irish rioters while the Belfast papers were more akin to the view of the Irish national press.

Recommendations

There are suggestions for further and future research that flow from this thesis. This study has focused on Belfast, but this could be broadened out into an examination of abolitionism in Ulster. Such a study would throw additional light on potential rural/urban divides. In the town, the stronghold of abolitionism was in the educated, middle-class liberals. Was it also the case in the countryside?

Even in the context of Belfast there is more work to be done on Anglican and female abolitionists. On the latter a particular aspect worthy of further attention is any links between female abolitionists and the call for women's liberation more generally.

Final statement

Ian McBride has stated: "No other European kingdom or province, then, was subjected to such extensive and sustained colonisation; and nowhere else did the consequent antagonisms exert such an enduring and controlling pull over subsequent history".[10] While there are arguments among historians over the true effects of the penal laws on Irish Dissenters, this thesis has shown that the contemporary perception that the Irish were oppressed was very real. Resentment at the penal laws fed into support for the abolition of slavery. This was certainly the case in Belfast. This thesis has established that Belfast abolitionist support was initially inspired by egalitarian views, and later it also attracted conservative support. During the nineteenth century the town saw growing divisions and increased levels of conflict, yet anti-slavery remained a cause that navigated religious and political divides with numerous denominational newspapers supporting the abolition of the British and American slave

[10] McBride, *The Isle of Slaves*, 165.

systems. Growing support for the cause saw the formation of the town's first official anti-slavery society. Through it all, the inherited memories of the penal laws gave the Irish as slave theme enduring appeal, even if different groups interpreted this in various ways. Belfast abolitionism was greatly affected by issues such as the tenant rights campaign and the great famine. Anger surrounding both further contributed to the survival of the Irish slave mentalité. Despite these challenges and the tremendous change in Belfast from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, Belfast abolitionism survived, crossing political and ideological divides as it drew from libertarian, egalitarian and conservative trends.

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Appendix 1

Table 1: Number of Belfast articles mentioning information relating to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act

	Directly mentions FSA	*Runaway Slave mentions*	*Fugitive Slave mentions*	*Negative stories of Slave owners*
1850				
Sept	2	1	4	10
Oct	5	1	12	13
Nov	8	1	11	11
Dec	10	1	13	6
1851				
Jan	9	2	18	10
Feb	8	0	10	25
Mar	7	1	14	15
Apr	9	0	19	15
May	3	1	6	12
Jun	10	0	10	18
Jul	7	1	14	7
Aug	14	6	22	21
Sept	4	2	8	13
Oct	6	1	9	15
Nov	6	1	6	11
Dec	8	0	11	9

Note: Table created using articles taken from the Belfast papers in this period, specifically: *Northern Whig*; *Belfast News-Letter*; *Weekly Vindicator*; *Banner of Ulster*; *Belfast Mercury*; *Belfast Mercantile Register and Weekly Advertiser*; *Ulster General Advertiser*, *Herald of Business and General Information.*

Appendix 2

Biographical information on prominent Belfast Newspapers 1775-1865

Chronological order:

Belfast News-Letter, 1737-present day:

Liberal pre-1790/moderate 1790-1820s/conservative post-1820s: Francis Joy published the first issue in September 1737. It was the first newspaper published in Belfast. In the 1790s the editor was the liberal Henry Joy (cousin to United Irishmen Henry Joy McCracken). Joy was a former Irish Volunteer who supported Irish legislative independence in 1780s. During the 1790s the newspaper became more moderate. Following the 1798 rebellion, new editor George Gordon promised to uphold "peace, order and the constitution".[1] The *News-Letter* soon became more parochial in its outlook and supported the Union in 1801. The newspaper became conservative under new proprietor Alexander Mackay (1804) and the family have had a connection ever since. Under the management of James Alexander Henderson (husband to Mackay's daughter Agnes) the paper increased in size and was published three days a week instead of two. It became a daily newspaper in 1855.

Daily circulation of the *Belfast News-Letter*:

Year	Circulation
1789	2,100
1792	2,300
1794	2,075
1837	1,058
1843	807
1850	696
1858	916
1860	400

See: Footnote 2.

[1] Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor eds., *Dictionary of Nineteenth-century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*, (Gent: Academia Press, 2009), 44.

[2] All information taken from *Belfast News-Letter*, *Vindicator*, *Northern Whig*, *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, *Ulsterman*, *Banner of Ulster*, *Belfast Morning News*. Also see: Oram, *The Newspaper*

Belfast Mercury or Freeman's Chronicle, 1783-1786:

Liberal: Printed and edited by Belfast based John Tisdall. There were rumours however that the real editor was Amyas Griffith, a liberal and Belfast's Excise Surveyor.[3] Published twice weekly, the paper described itself as the mouthpiece of the Volunteers. Due to its early establishment and short publication run there is little surviving information about the newspaper's background or its circulation.

Northern Star, 1792-1797:

Liberal/ Political/Catholic: The newspaper was the organ of the United Irishmen and was edited by local draper and founding member of the Society Samuel Nielson, a long-time supporter of Catholic emancipation. It reflected the increased radicalism in Belfast in the 1790s. It was circulated as far as London," although its news was almost exclusively North of Ireland".[4] The newspaper carried both radical political and literary articles. It had the largest and most widespread circulation in Ireland with an average print run of over 4000 copies.[5]

Belfast Commercial Chronicle, 1805-1855:

Conservative/neutral: The newspaper claimed it would be "consistent and independent, though temperate, [and an] advocate of the rights of the people…is unswayed by narrow views or sectarian principles…for a type of free press open to all parties, influenced by none".[6]

Book; Robert Munter, *The History of the Irish Newspaper 1685-1760*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Stephen J. Brown, *The Press in Ireland: A Survey and a Guide*, (Belfast: Brown and Nolan, 1937); John S. North, *The Waterloo Directory of Irish Newspapers and Periodicals, 1800-1900*, (Ontario: North Waterloo Academic Press, 1986). Smaller figures are from quarterly stamp returns while larger figures are from the combined yearly stamp returns. Contemporary newspapers published a mixture of both at various times.

[3] George Benn, *A History of the Town of Belfast: From the Earliest Times to the Close of the Eighteenth Century*, (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2008), 441.

[4] Oram, *Newspaper Book*, 41-42.

[5] Brown, *Press in Ireland*, 150; Gillian O'Brien, ''Spirit, Impartiality and Independence': "The Northern Star", 1792-1797', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 13 (1998): 7-23, (p.16).

[6] A.A. Campbell, *Belfast Newspapers, Past and Present*, (Belfast: np, 1921), 55.

Daily circulation of the *Belfast Commercial Chronicle:*

Year	Circulation
1837	672
1840	769
1843	769
1850	577
1851	494
1853	458

See: Footnote 7.

Belfast Monthly Magazine, 1808-1814:

Liberal: Edited by Belfast liberals, William Drennan, John Templeton and John Hancock – Drennan and Templeton were former United Irishmen – the *Monthly Magazine* was founded with egalitarian views. The magazine was popular among the town's middle-class liberals, purely due to its content which touched upon the classics, politics and popular curiosities such as science and innovation.[8] It has been claimed the magazine was the only opposition publication in the early 1800s that "did not descend to scurrility".[9] There are no known circulation figures.

Northern Whig, 1824-1963:

Liberal/unionist: Founded and published by Francis Dalzell Finlay, a former protégé of William Drennan, the newspaper was liberal and supported Catholic emancipation, tenant rights and political reform. Following the success of the *Belfast Morning News* in the 1850s the *Northern Whig* became a daily in 1858.

[7] All information taken from: *Northern Whig, Banner of Ulster* and *Belfast Commercial Chronicle.*
[8] Jennifer Leigh Jozic, ''HERE WE CAN BEHOLD THE GREAT MACHINE IN MOTION': THE BELFAST MONTHLY MAGAZINE, 1808-1814', (M.A. Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2005), 30-35.
[9] North, *Waterloo Directory*, 64-65.

Daily circulation of the *Northern Whig:*

Year	Circulation
1837	1,000
1843	1,346
1850	1,831
1855	1,794
1858	1,795

See: Footnote 10.

Northern Herald, 1833-1836:

Liberal/nationalist: First Catholic newspaper in Belfast. The newspaper's editor was Charles Hamilton Teeling. Teeling was a member of the United Irishmen in his youth and his brother (a fellow member) was hanged in 1798. The newspaper sought to revive the spirit of the United Irishmen within its pages. Among the contributors were Charles Gavin Duffy and Thomas O'Hagan, later Lord Chancellor of Ireland. Due to its short publication run there are no known circulation figures.

Ulster Times, 1836-1843:

Conservative/Unionist: A thrice weekly newspaper the *Ulster Times* was modelled on the *Times* of London. It was ardently patriotic publishing a crown and sceptre on its cover. As well as local news, articles covered national and international news, particularly politics.

Daily circulation of the *Ulster Times*:

Year	Circulation
1842	833
1843	596

See: Footnote 11.

[10] All information taken from: *Northern Whig* and *Belfast Morning News.*
[11] All information taken from: *Northern Whig* and *Ulster Times*.

Irish Friend, 1837-1842:

Liberal/Quaker: The *Friend* was the first newspaper aimed towards members of the Religious Society of Friends in the British Isles. Inspired by the American Quaker aimed newspaper the *Philadelphia Friend,* the *Irish Friend*'s editor William Bell promoted articles and events which were relevant to British Quakers. The newspaper became significantly popular, and after its closure in November 1842 (due to Bell's emigration to America) two new newspapers were founded to fill the resulting gap. These were the *British Friend,* published in Glasgow and the *Friend,* published in London. Both had their first issues published in the first weeks of 1843, demonstrating the significant vacuum the *Irish Friend* had left.

Daily circulation of the *Irish Friend*:

Year	Circulation
1839	1,500
1840	2,000

See: Footnote 12.

Vindicator/*Weekly Vindicator*, 1839-1852:

Liberal/nationalist/bi-weekly: Charles Gavan Duffy was the first editor of the nationalist Catholic *Vindicator*, an O'Connellite paper. O'Connell claimed the newspaper was "of incalculable service to the cause of freedom".[13] In 1842, Duffy stepped down to establish the *Nation* in Dublin. He was replaced by Kevin T. Buggy who died soon after in 1843 and was replaced by C. D. Fitzgerald. It was closed in 1848, after being prosecuted for libel. In 1848, the *Vindicator* was renamed the *Weekly Vindicator* and continued under that name until 1852. The newspaper regularly published contributions by members of the Young

[12] *Irish Friend,* Vol. 3, No. 10, p. 1. According to statistics, this would mean more than half of all Quaker households in the British Isles were purchasing the newspaper. See: Bernard Canter, 'A Pioneer Quaker Newspaper: The Irish Friend, 1837-1842', (Unpublished manuscript: Private Collection, Newry, 1967), 30. Also see: Rowntree, *Quakerism past and present,* Chapter IV.
[13] Brown, *Press in Ireland,* 151.

Irelanders. The failure of the Young Irelander rebellion in 1848 negatively affected the paper. In 1849 the newspaper changed its publication to Mondays and Fridays, in 1850 it became a weekly. Two years later the paper closed for good.

Daily circulation of the *Vindicator:*

Year	Circulation
1840	933
1842	1,231
1843	923

See: Footnote 14.

Banner of Ulster, 1842-1869:

Orthodox Presbyterian/liberal: The tri-weekly *Banner of Ulster* was established in June 1842, by the Revd William Gibson, minister of Rosemary Street Church in the town. An organ of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, its purpose was to uphold orthodox principles and give direction regarding the Scottish church disruption controversy. Edited by the Scotsman George Troup, lead contributors came from the membership and clergy of the Assembly. In 1866, the paper was taken over by Samuel McCormick. However, following the success of the *News-Letter* and *Northern Whig* after both became dailies, the *Banner*'s popularity declined, and the paper closed around 1870.

Daily circulation of the *Banner of Ulster:*

Year	Circulation
1843	1,192
1850	1,090
1851	1,186
1855	653
1858	579
1860	487

See: Footnote 15.

[14] All information taken from: *Northern Whig, Belfast News-Letter* and *Banner of Ulster.*
[15] All information taken from: *Northern Whig, Belfast News-Letter* and *Banner of Ulster.*

Ulster General Advertiser, Herald of Business and General Information, 1842-91:

Founded in 1842 by Andrew McKendrick, a printer in Belfast, the *Ulster General Advertiser* was a weekly newspaper issued gratuitously. In 1852, the proprietor was John Wallace, who moved the office to Donegall Street, where it continued until its closure in 1891.

Daily circulation of the *Ulster General Advertiser*:

Year	Circulation
1842	591
1843	4,250
1850	8,000

See: Footnote 16.

Belfast Mercury, 1851-1861:

Liberal/radical: A tri-weekly newspaper founded in March 1851 and edited by James Simms, former editor of the *Northern Whig*. In 1854 the *Mercury* became the first provincial daily newspaper in Ireland. Simms died in 1858 and the newspaper was taken over by the Ulster Printing Company.

Daily circulation of the *Belfast Mercury*:

Year	Circulation
1853	714
1855	864
1858	315
1859	181
1860	200

See: Footnote 17.

[16]All information taken from: *Northern Whig, Belfast News-Letter* and *Banner of Ulster.*
[17] All information taken from: *Northern Whig, Belfast News-Letter, Belfast Mercury* and *Banner of Ulster.*

Ulsterman, 1852-1859:

Catholic/liberal: Ulsterman was a bi-weekly newspaper. Newspaper was an ardent supporter of Catholic rights. The editor Denis Holland was former editor of the *Northern Whig*. The *Ulsterman* closed in 1859, when Holland established the *Irishman.*

Daily circulation of the *Ulsterman*:

Year	Circulation
1853	649
1858	480

See: Footnote 18.

Belfast Morning News, 1855-1892:

Catholic/liberal: The *Belfast Morning News* was the prominent Catholic paper in the period. However, it was broadly read across all of Belfast's denominations and was liberal in its outlook. By July 1856 it was selling 7,080 copies per issue, over 5,000 more than that of its closest rival the *Northern Whig.* The paper's popularity attracted the animosity of the conservative *News-Letter* which came third in the circulation numbers. As a result, the *News-Letter* publicly criticised the paper: "We warn the people of Belfast that the *Morning News* emanates from the Press which printed the Douai Bible. It has been established on the street hawking system and has as its readers, servants, street-sweepers, pedlars and pot-hogs."[19]

Daily circulation of the *Belfast Morning News*:

Year	Circulation
1856	7,080
1858	10,000
1872	12,500

See: Footnote 20.

[18] All information taken from: *Northern Whig, Belfast News-Letter, Ulsterman* and *Banner of Ulster.*
[19] Oram, *Newspaper Book*, 67.
[20] All information taken from*: Northern Whig, Belfast Morning News* and *Belfast News-Letter.*

Belfast Morning Post, 1853-1858:

Liberal: A tri-weekly newspaper, the *Morning Post* was owned by brother Robert and Daniel Read. Its most famous writer was Robert Arthur Wilson, also known as 'Barney Maglone'.

Ulster Observer, 1862-1868:

Liberal/Catholic: A tri-weekly newspaper, the *Ulster Observer* was founded by A. J. McKenna in order to give a voice to Catholic views and the "vindication of their rights".[21] The newspaper was well regarded for its literary section.

[21] Brake and Demoor, *Nineteenth-century Journalism*, 645.